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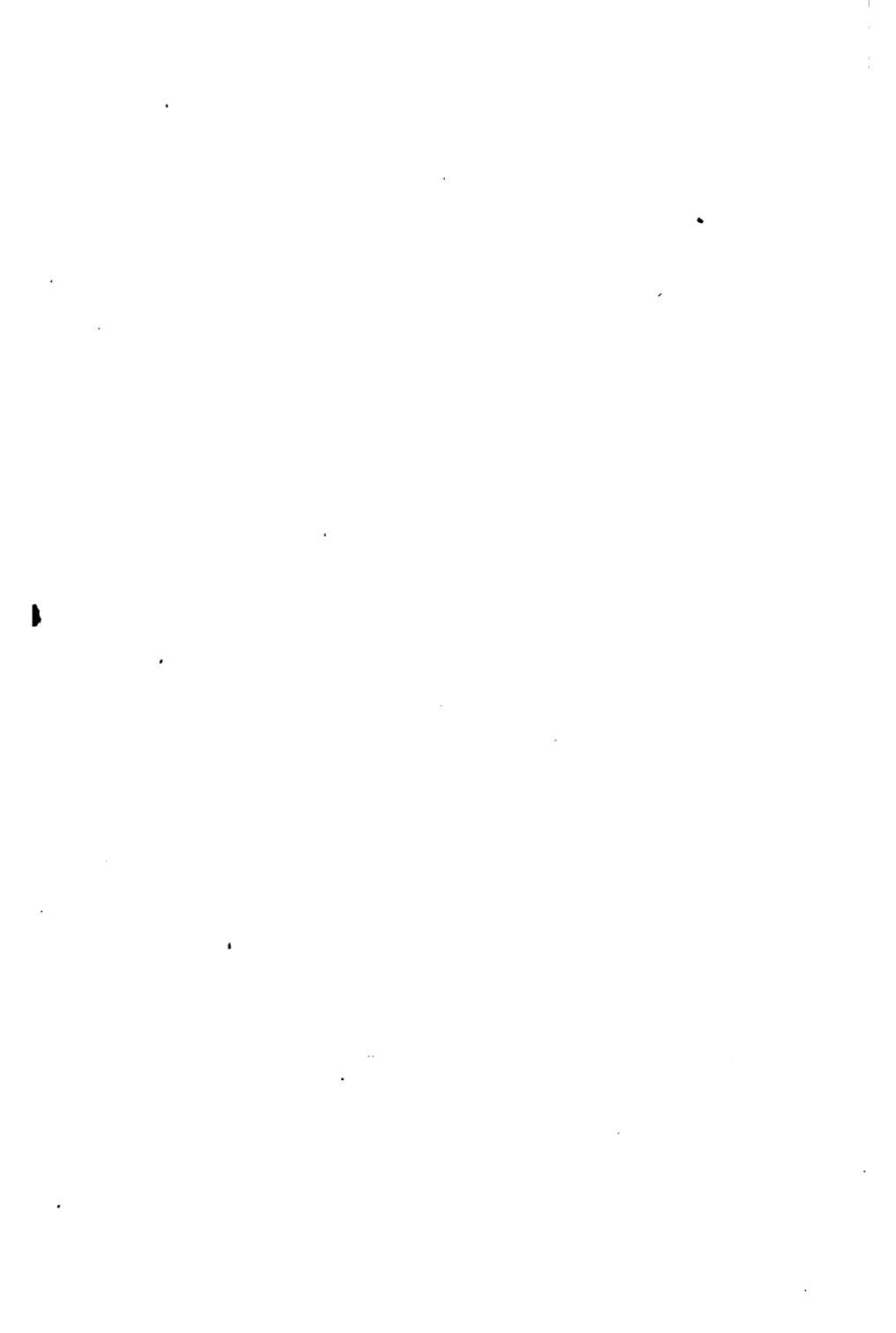


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HIRONDELLE

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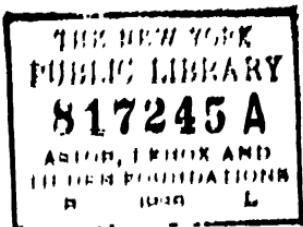
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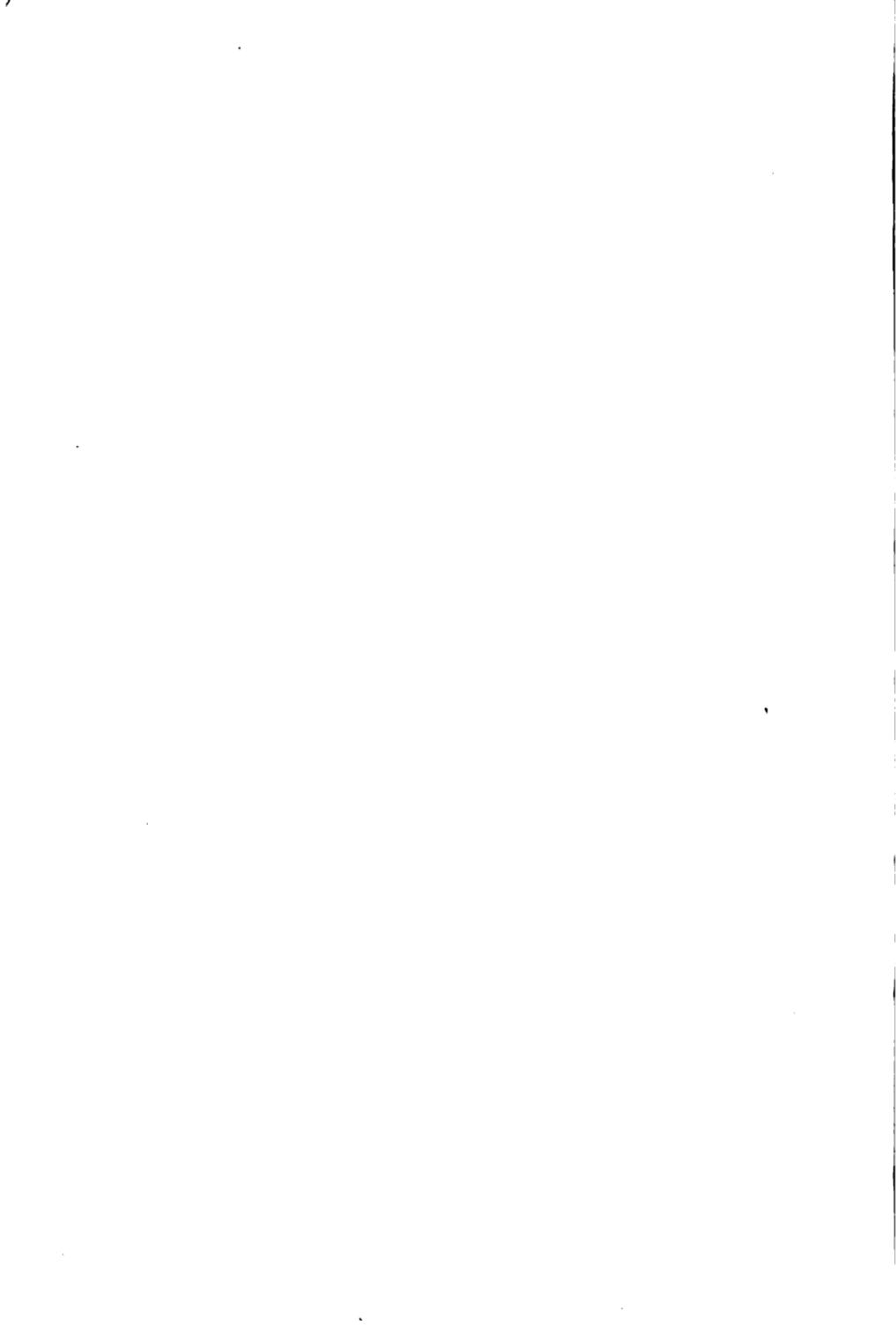
HIRONDELLE

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Printed in the U.S.A.

First Edition
H.W.

HIRONDELLE

Transfer from C.P. Jan. 1956



HIRONDELLE

Chapter I

THE Earl O'Conor thrust back his big chair from the table over which he had been leaning in close examination of sundry plans and drawings clearly outlined on scrolls of parchment paper held down by two straight swords.

In an embrasure of the long window, which was open, sat the Lady Sheila and the mellow autumn sunlight bathed her dark beauty in a wash of gold. Her black fringed eyes were cast down in brooding contemplation of a scene of bustling activity on the shingled beach two hundred yards below. Here the skeleton of a ship was set up in the stocks, frames already placed to project unevenly above the sheer-strake which had been provisionally laid in place, and there came up in staccato musical diapason like a xylophone, the mellow clatter of hammers, and the whine of saws and the biting cut of adzes, and now and then a snatch of song from some one of the more light-hearted builders.

They were a strange crew, these builders, alien men at whom the local dwellers looked askance and gave wide berth in passing on the road or when chattering over their cups in the ale-house. Certain of these ship carpenters were swarthy and fierce of face, and some were fair and fierce of face, and many bore the mark of ugly scars, and most of the crew carried themselves with a sort of trucu-

lence, while others held themselves aloof and showed disinclination to look a body squarely in the eye. There were dark Levantines and yellow Danes, and a few squat Portuguese, hook-nosed and ringed of ears, and a great black man, with a cleft forehead and rolling mottled eyes.

Brawls between them were not infrequent, though quickly silenced in the presence of old Horrocks, who seemed now to have recovered his vigor as through some miracle and who was master shipwright of the ill-set crew.

They were lodged about the semi-ruined castle in grange and stables and garret, and for the most part they were well enough conducted as men accustomed to a harsh peremptory discipline. There were good artisans and indifferent amongst them, the latter assigned to the heavier, rougher tasks, but none were without some special quality of men whose hands were trained for tool as well as weapon. The local folk knew not whence they had been gathered nor how, and at first the constabulary had kept a watchful eye upon them, then finding them to be like savage dogs, trained to submission by a master whom they feared, had left them to such control.

The strange ship was growing apace and it had become a habit of the Lady Sheila to sit there in the window and watch its assembling proportions. But her gaze was principally directed in curious contemplation of young Ruderic, designing architect, who with rule or calipers or chalk line moved constantly among the workers verifying curve or angle or the laying down of great adze-hewn timbers or passing on the justness of a frame's pitch and placement. Sometimes he conferred or even argued with Master Horrocks and sometimes he reproved the rough fitting of a butt or bevel of a piece of planking.

At first there had been some slight friction between him and certain of the men, and more than one of them

had felt the hard swift impact of his fist in prompt and savage payment for impertinence. It seemed to the Lady Sheila, that there was too much of the harsh slave-driver in this strange young man with his clear direct but sullen and intolerant eyes. She could not fathom him at all, and more than once she had been startled at the yellow gleam of them when he was talking with her father.

O'Conor rose from his chair, strode to the window and looked out over Sheila's head, which in the late sunlight held lights resembling the iridescence of peacock coal. Her hair was fine and thick and grew from her broad white forehead in a "widow's peak," brushed smoothly at first and then in sharp undulations like waves thrust back by a current.

A traveled person of the period on observing the Lady Sheila and in ignorance of her identity would without hesitation have pronounced her French, probably Auvergnate or Marseillaise but with no question of her noble birth. He would have been the more convinced of this on hearing her English diction, which was very correct, a little quaint and stilted as a language studied academically is apt to be, and with a soft and pretty accent which was not precisely French, nor yet an Irish burr. Actually it was Creole, acquired from her girl associates in the convent school at New Orleans where she had passed the earlier years of her life.

But if these seductive traits of her physical allure, were French (and with perfect right, her mother having been French Creole which contains no African corpuscles as many wrongly suppose) so was also her type the purest and loveliest specimen of what the Emerald Isle can offer for an exhibit of feminine charm. In face and body Sheila was illustratively Irish, except perhaps in one detail, the matter of complexion. Having spent the early years of her life in the lowlands of Louisiana with vacation visits

to her Creole and other schoolmates whose homes were in Mobile and Charleston, her fine skin had not been rosily tinted by the sea-fogs of the Irish coast, so that it was *matte*, rather than of the peach-bloom of Irish girls, and her color appeared rarely and delicately as the reaction of some emotion.

But her features were none the less delicious and characteristic of her ancestral region. The blue-black hair, eyes of a violet that was almost purple and a little nose straight and fine and high of bridge as became her quality, but lifted at its tip with free space under it to an everted upper lip which was like the stroke of painter's brush dipped in carmine, and held a pout not petulant but inviting, and beneath it a chin of firmness which seemed to reprove the mouth's allure. It was indeed a combative chin which told of pride and courage and determination and seemed to defy possession of the tempting mouth, and hold it in restraint.

O'Conor also, though distinctive of a certain type of Irish nobleman in his dark, clean-cut aquiline features, had little in his speech to suggest the native Hibernian. This was scholarly and held a precision of words and accent almost pedantic at times. His English was in fact that of the well-educated English-speaking gentleman of almost any country and its phrasing and figures such as to lead the listener to believe what was in fact the case, that he was a reader, a bibliophile in leisure moments, and his conversation colored to a considerable extent by his perusals. There was also a certain quality of throaty inflexion and not unpleasant modulation to his voice which suggested the polyglot of souple tongue and gorge and mental faculty of instant translation, though unlike many familiar with a number of tongues he was never at a loss which led to his borrowing a word from the foreign lexicons he carried in his head.

"The work goes on rapidly," said O'Conor. "It should be a good vessel, if one departing from all known standards and ideas. Young Ruderic knows what he wants, and what is more knows how to go about the getting of it."

"I should not call him, 'young' Ruderic," said Sheila. "In years he may not have but three more than my own, and yet has it not struck you, father, that there is some strange agelessness about him."

"The immortality of genius," said O'Conor, "for the lad is none less. And yet, I question that in his case the fire is what might be called divine. There is some impatient devil sitting in that boy."

"It looks out through his eyes," said Sheila, "when he talks to you and sometimes when he talks to me. One might say some hatred of us scorches at his soul as that hot iron is burning its way into the oak of the ship's side."

O'Conor shook his head. "It is hatred of humanity," said he, "the fanatical hatred born of listening to the parables of Master Horrocks who is himself an arch hater of sorts, through some wrong dealt him at some epoch in his life. They are both master haters and master builders, and master drivers of men. We should have a good crew for our venture."

Sheila turned her lithe body and looked up at him. She was a well-grown girl of twenty-three, supple as a sea-otter and as much at home in the water.

Little was known of the pair who had come to their ancestral home from some place overseas, a matter of some three years before. Their few tenantry feared them, yet had no cause for this or other hostile emotion. O'Conor, if scant of speech, was free of hand, had always a ready word or kindly greeting and exacted only prompt obedience to his wishes. Though he was the tenth O'Conor to dwell upon the land, there existed between him and his people not one spark of sympathy.

Yet none could deny that father and daughter were joined by some uncommon passion of filial and paternal devotion. Sheila's eyes followed him when he moved with a burning tenderness, and were she but a few moments late in returning from one of her lonely rides, or bathing in the sea, and his handsome face was shot with a sudden ferocity of disquietude. Grooms or maids would then be sent scurrying in obedience to a curt command. It was as if he feared some covert malevolence overshadowed her. Intimate friends among the gentry they had none, though the castle furnished not infrequently a lavish hospitality unusual in that impoverished region.

Shane O'Conor was perhaps the first one of his line to give evidence of riches, and though none could guess the source of these they were constantly in evidence. He had hinted in his conversations at a fortune gained in West Indian trade, and at certain legacies, and other vague sources of revenue. But it was perforce accepted as enough that he had put in some semblance of order the crumbling estate and kept a retinue of well-paid servants, mostly fetched with him from foreign parts.

Now, feeling Sheila's eyes upon him, he withdrew a little from the window, then folded his arms and looked at her, with a smile upon his thin lips, these lips neither cruel nor saturnine, nor yet of avaricious molding, but seldom lacking in a sort of ruthless inflexibility. His mouth was the mouth of a prelate, concise, assured as though its purpose were the pronouncing of some final word to which there was no appeal.

"What is in your mind, daughter?" he asked.

"There are two things which I must know, Father," she replied. "First, what is to be the actual mission of this vessel?"

"Trade," answered O'Conor. "Have I not told you that?"

"Free trade?"

"Call it such, but not in the cheap matter of running contraband. Trade on a coast and among island colonies where the conditions of such commerce are prohibitory to men like myself."

"I see that I must be content with that," said Sheila. "Then, who are these men whom you have brought here to build this ship, and man her when completed?"

O'Conor shrugged. "Some are men who have sailed with me before," he answered. "Others, those to whom I am not unknown, as a captain of successful ventures."

The girl's eyes narrowed. "Pirates?" she asked.

O'Conor gave a soft laugh. "There is scant doubt but that some few of them have sailed under the *Jolly Roger*. But when it comes to that, so has Master Horrocks, who is to ship as my navigator. And so most ardently desires to be your young friend Ruderic."

Sheila sprang to her feet. "He is no friend of mine," she answered, vexedly, and her violet eyes were dark as sapphires. "For some reason that I cannot guess, he hates us both. And I hate him. Nor do I trust him."

O'Conor shrugged. "As for that I am ready to trust any man so long as our interests weld together. But I tell you that you are wrong. He is a youth of genius and aside from that a hater. Has he got a friend in this place? Does he not pass by the people here with the look of a wolf stalking among dogs?"

Sheila resumed her seat upon which she moved uneasily. There was about the girl some quality to be seen less in the cat than in a sleek otter, and a certain birdlike sense of balance. Her limbs were long and round with exquisite taper to small, strong wrists and ankles and a fullness of the chest, less of bosom than of lung, and firm pulsing tissue from which was drawn not only grace but strength. Her waist was too small for that of an athletic

girl, but it was round with swelling curves above it and beneath, and seemed less body than a sort of supple link to the separate segments of her.

She looked again at the animated scene beneath and at this moment Ruderic, in a gust of impatience at some bungler, took a sturdy rascal by the shoulder and flung him a pace or two aside, then appeared to be pouring out a hot blast of abuse at his slovenly handicraft.

"Now there," said O'Conor in a tone of satisfaction, "is an overseer for you."

"Not for me!" cried Sheila. "He seems ever on the point of violence. There is some devil sitting in him as you say. He mocks me to my face. He has been schooled in Edinburgh and has no doubt his talents and yet nothing will do for him but he must go a-pirating."

"But we are not to go a-pirating, sweetheart," protested O'Conor.

"He thinks you are, and so does that polished demon, his uncle, old Horrocks, with his smooth lion's purr and scholar's verbiage. Did not Ruderic tell you in so many words that he would build you this vessel and sail with you as your mate only on your agreement that there was to be no quibbling as to the nature of your adventure?"

"The insistence of hot-headed youth, englamored by the sophistries and cold-blooded theorizing of an old renegade iconoclast embittered by some grievance against society. Now mark you, Sheila, I do not claim for my adventure that it is legitimate, but going a-pirating I am not. I have too much consideration for my neck and the good things of life still to pass down inside it these many years. I am trusting to the peculiar qualities of this vessel to pursue the adventure with amazing profit and a very wide margin of safety, and if I were not convinced of this I should never consent to your sailing with us, even as far as Port Royal."

Sheila's violet eyes flickered at him with a sort of affectionate contempt.

"I shall sail with you wherever you sail, Father mine," said she. "I do not pretend to understand fully the peculiar features of this craft, beyond that she is promised to be swifter than any afloat, and may navigate shallow waters which far smaller vessels cannot, and that she is to have an excellent armament for her defense or the defiance of authority. But go I shall, if only to keep my eye on this young hand-grenade of yours, who, if you have not a care will, I am convinced, hoist you on his own petard."

O'Conor patted her shoulder. "So be it, sweet —" said he, and looked down the precipitous path which led to the beach. "Here comes now the object of your distrust to confer with me upon the day's work."

Chapter II

IN the living room of a cottage assigned them by O'Conor as their domicile during the building of the ship, Master Horrocks, the shipwright, and the young man supposed by all to be his nephew, were in earnest consultation. The elder was a man of massive bony frame and cavernous eyes in which deep fires glowed. His features were harsh yet scholarly, and his thick grizzled hair clustered about his ears and framed a face which was fierce yet curiously ascetic. He was seated in a big armchair of rich if shabby tapestry, and an Indian shawl was thrown across his knees.

The younger man stood with his back to the hearth on which glowed a small peat fire. Like the elder he, too, was heavy, of bony frame but with a springiness of youth; deep chested, small of waist and narrow hipped, and also, like the elder, his face though square of jaw was stamped with an intellectuality which distinguished him from others of his station. But this distinction was far from being physical alone. It showed itself in his manner of speaking, in choice of words which were brief but comprehensive, and not of the selection which one would have expected to hear from the lips of a master craftsman. He had formed the habit of them from close association with Master Horrocks, a scholar of wide attainments and a certain school of philosophy which had its resurrection in Central Europe, no philosophy being a new one.

So that here was the curious situation of the Earl O'Conor and Horrocks, master shipwright with what-

ever else he might have been, and his nephew Ruderic, naval architect by profession, engaged in a little bight on the west of Ireland coast in the building of a ship which was an even greater departure from the marine construction of the region than was this trio from the type of its inhabitants. A stranger listening to one of their consultations would have judged them three stilted pedants with Ruderic no doubt the greatest pedagogue, this partly because of the technical expressions of his craft, but more because of his constraint and constant effort at a formal, or more accurately an official precision, like a subaltern to his colonel, or lieutenant to his commanding officer. But this same formality obtained also in his discourse with his uncle, perhaps from precept and because, like O'Conor and Horrocks, he was himself a reader.

Even in his dealings with the men he observed a sort of harsh contemptuous superiority of words and phrasing as though to keep constantly before their minds the fact that he had nothing in common with them, that they were no more to him than a set of tools of low-grade metal, but such as the conditions forced him to make use of, and which he ground as he saw fit to keep upon them some semblance of edge. There was none of the democracy or good-nature of mutual effort at the work in hand. He did not ask for zeal or conscientious endeavor. He compelled it. He forced them to it as a hard driver might force his laboring team and the growling workers were not long in learning that he had taken accurately their measure and would be content with nothing less than the full limit of their capabilities, which, as a matter of fact, were considerable. And there was always a yellow gleam in Ruderic's golden eyes and a rigidity about the set of his square jaw which seemed hungrily to invite the challenge of authority, and so far any who had offered this were quickly brought to cowed submission.

Ruderic now stood with strong legs braced apart and shoulders of unusual breadth for one of his years, touching the rim of the mantel.

"The work goes well enough, Uncle, all things considered," said he. "The men growl and sneer at the uncommon construction and design of the vessel, but such dogs would growl and sneer at anything. If they live to see her work among the reefs and shoals and shallow thoroughfares for which she is destined they may change their minds about her—which makes no odds—" he finished in contempt.

"I hope, lad," said Horrocks, "that you may be able to complete the work without bloodshed."

Ruderic gave a short, bitter laugh. "Why as to that, Uncle," he answered, "there are one or two of the ugly swine I could do without, and would not be sorry for good reason to suppress. There's no good in any of the boiling, barring only Dirk who seems to have some grains of honesty. The rest are swill of the sea, former buccaneers and pirates and brutes of O'Conor's crew on some of his slaving voyages from Anamaboe and other depots on the coast of Africa."

Horrocks nodded. "That Simon Peter is very apt to knife you some day if he gets the chance, Ruderic," said he, "and Yellow Jack is not much better."

Ruderic gave a scornful grunt. "I fell foul of them both to-day," said he, "Yellow Jack for giving me a saucy answer and Simon Peter because of his ill treatment of poor Lanty." His face darkened. "Something tells me that Simon Peter has swung nearly to the end of his scope, Uncle. He is the only one who dares to snarl and show his teeth. One of these fine days he is going to snap, and that is very apt to be the end of him."

"Easy does it, lad," rumbled Horrocks. "This same Simon Peter is O'Conor's prime favorite."

"Then O'Conor may soon have to pick another," said Ruderic, coolly. "If I am to handle pirates I shall do so after a manner they understand."

Horrocks frowned and drew the shawl a little more snugly about his knees. "Perhaps you are right," said he. "At the present juncture I should say that there is little O'Conor would not support you in. He is delighted with the progress of the vessel and cannot find high enough praise for the talents of her designer."

Ruderic smiled, albeit a little grimly. "He was a quick convert to the working of the thirty-foot model. My only fear is now that O'Conor's daring may not prove to be on a level with his avarice and thieving instincts."

Horrocks drew down the corners of his empurpled lips.

"Man is, by virtue of his unasked existence, a predatory creature first and last," said he, "and O'Conor is no exception. This prating of Golden Rule and right which is not based on might is the argument of theorists or weaklings and not borne out by any sound philosophy. But O'Conor compromised by substituting stealth for strength when he conspired with the pirate Redbeard to run up the river and load some of his loot on your father's wherry, so that he might be taken with the plunder, and thus convicted of giving aid and comfort to the pirates and sharing in their gain. He was already under grave suspicion, but even then he would have escaped paying the supreme penalty if he had not so freely avowed himself ready and willing to support the cause of colonial independence with his wealth and with his sword. Wherefore it was no difficult matter for O'Conor, then posing as a Royalist, to get him sentenced by the bribing of false witnesses, two of them your father's own men."

Ruderic's face turned white, as it always did at these recapitulations which Horrocks had fed him from boyhood. But he shook his head.

"O'Conor is too sly a stoat to fall into any such trap as that," said he.

"Much depends on the skill of the trapper, and the bait he uses," Horrocks answered. "It was caution which drove him from the buccaneering which he combined with his slave traffic, and which furnished him with the funds to acquire later the confiscated estates of your father, adjoining to his own raw plantation. And it will be the satisfying of this very caution through this invention of yours which will lead him back to it again."

"It may lead him back to the running of slaves," said Ruderic, "but I do not believe that it is any part of his plan to go a-pirating."

"Then," said Horrocks, "it is ours to force him to it."

Ruderic's eyes blazed. They were strangely colored eyes, the hue of wet yellow kelp, very clear and widely set. "It will not take a deal of forcing, with this precious pack of sea-wolves you and he have gathered. Yes, we shall force him to it for long enough to see him hanged in chains."

Horrocks looked at him curiously. "And the daughter?" he asked.

The blood surged up under Ruderic's skin which, unlike that of most artisans of his trade, was very clear and white and would have seemed to indicate less the exposure of the shipyard than midnight oil and the occupations of the student.

"The girl shall taste my mother's fate," he growled. "All in due time, Uncle." Then added, vehemently: "I wish that I could be convinced that you yourself were not weakening at the fulfillment of this revenge for which you have so carefully schooled me."

Old Horrocks sighed. "I love you, lad," said he; "as much as I loved your father before you, and of late I have begun to wonder if I do not love you even more. But a

vow is after all a vow and it would seem as if this invention developed of your genius were a direct gift of Destiny to deliver our enemy into our hands."

"That is true," said Ruderic, eagerly. "The nature of O'Conor is very plain. He is predatory as a sheep-killing collie, but he has the collie's caution. There is more of the dog about him than of the wolf or tiger or sea-eagle. He sees now in this craft of ours the opportunity for free trade at its maximum and with a minimum of risk of capture and destruction. Perhaps, too, his coffers may be getting low, and he desires to replenish them in some few months and then retire to a life of that luxury which the soul of such a man craves. And there is one fact which goes to make our work all the sweeter, which is the unquestionable love he bears his daughter."

Horrocks turned in his chair and looked searchingly at his disciple. "Have you fallen victim to her charms, lad?" he asked, directly.

Ruderic gave a short laugh. "Why yes, Uncle," he answered, coolly, "to speak the truth I have, and that very fact shall make the accomplishment of my purpose all the dearer to me. No doubt I love her as O'Conor loved my mother, and it is in my mind that the fulfillment of this shall be much in the same fashion."

There came a knock at the cottage door, and at Horrocks' vibrant summons there entered a curious figure and one of which the sudden apparition must have given a start of amused astonishment to one who beheld it for the first time.

This was a squat little person of individuality so pronounced that if the stranger had encountered him at dusk sitting on a stile or skipping through the brume he would have been immediately convinced that he had come upon the family boggart or friendly familiar of the place, which was perhaps the true character of Lanty O'Callahan.

In appearance he was undersized though not wizened of face or body, the former occupying the entire front of a bullet head on the top of which the scrubby hair grew almost to the eyebrows, so that one could not help but wonder where the brain, which Lanty unquestionably possessed, found its receptable. His large and slightly bulging eyes of a soft reddish brown were widely spaced with no bridge of nose between them, this feature being scarcely more than a small upturned tip with wide and sensitive nostrils. Beneath it was a broad space of upper lip, curiously mobile as was also the wide mouth of which the extremities seemed constantly a-quiver as though unable to hold itself firmly under the playing of swiftly succeeding emotions. The big ears stuck straight out like the ears of a bat.

The body beneath this grotesque face was no less curious shaped like a keg with legs which would have been spindling but for the round knots of muscle in the calves, and they were arched and strong and springy as a bent yew bow. Hands and feet were incongruously large, the former big of knuckle and not lacking in power. The little fellow was possessed of an uncanny nimbleness and adroitness of hand and he had a trick of juggling objects when alone or to amuse a humble audience. He possessed, also, some faculty of projecting his voice from closet or cupboard and could mimic that of any with flawless accuracy of speech and intonations, as also he was able to imitate the sounds of birds and animals.

Ruderic from some observation of this man, if man he could be called, had discovered two traits which were pleasing even to his unfriendly disposition—for such it had been shaped by Horrocks—one of which was the peculiar attraction possessed by Lanty for the children of the place. These always courted his society and the same was true of the dogs and cats and poultry and pigeons,

and Ruderic had several times seen Lanty pause in an errand and chatter to the rooks until they dropped down from their crevices in the stones and ivy to cover him like swarming bees, and squabble for bounties in his hands and the pockets of the long-tailed blue cutaway coat with its big brass buttons. The other pleasing trait to Ruderic's nature up to this time suppressed and grim, was Lanty's invariable mirthfulness and habit of chuckling to himself as though listening to jokes inaudible to others, and he had a curious habit of repeating to himself such a command as he might receive in the voice of the person who had given it, and then scuttling off in obedience to its purport.

O'Conor, whose astute mind had been quick to recognize in the "natural" a profound fidelity with the nimbleness of wit and natural gifts and instincts, which did not exist in others, had requisitioned Lanty as body servant and orderly with some of the duties of butler, and in this quality the curious fellow was costumed in a quaint old livery dug out from some moldy chest in the attic, the blue dress coat with its sharp points and tails almost to his heels, red velvet breeches, silk hose and brogue-like slippers with big silver buckles polished to the last degree of brilliance.

Lanty's age, so far as one could estimate it from his look, might have been anywhere from seventeen to seventy. But as his appearance had not changed in the recollection of most of the personnel he could not have been in the flush of mortal youth. None took great heed of this through not considering him entirely mortal.

But if Lanty had some eerie quality then at least he was in no sense pagan, but a good Christian of devout and humble faith. He was moreover assiduous not only in his worship but in the practice of his doctrine, and always at the disposition of Father Flaherty, the priest, whether

for the care of his chapel or in the undertakings of missions of mercy among the poor and sick.

He stood now in the doorway with his wide mouth twining and quivering at the corners, then with a salute said in startling imitation of O'Conor.

"Lanty, my compliments to Master Ruderic, and can he spare me a few moments at the Hall to drink a glass of wine before retiring."

"My compliments to his lordship," said Ruderic, "and I shall place myself immediately at his service."

Chapter III

ON a dull November morning Ruderic mounted a pony and rode off across the moor to the town some few miles distant, his errand being to visit a rope-walk where the cordage of the vessel was in progress of twisting.

It was at this little port that Master Horrocks had for some years pursued his craft of shipwright and had a little yard and shop and a modest cottage, all now closed since he and Ruderic had taken employment with O'Conor. Ruderic had been there but little of late years, absent in the pursuance of his studies at Edinburgh, and working for awhile first at Belfast then on the Clyde to perfect himself in the science and art of ship designing. His acquaintanceship in the region was wide enough, though his friendships when all is said and done were a lacking quality. Master Horrocks had always held himself aloof, was an enigma to the neighbors who had known him through a score of years of residence, was regarded as free thinker, heretic, educated far beyond his station, supplied with a means which his earnings as a craftsman could not explain, ironically superior to the common people while yet in no relations with the gentry. No doubt to some extent he was respected as one must be who, tending strictly to his own affairs, takes not the slightest interest in those of his neighbors, and Ruderic, supposed to be his nephew, shared fully in this undemonstrative taboo.

There was, in fact, about the pair a sort of haughty indifference to all but their books, which few could under-

stand, and their work, which none of the region understood better. This latter was in fair enough demand to give them ample occupation. But both were aliens and aliens they would remain most evidently of their own accord.

The last small boat built by this self-centered pair, a sort of wherry without keel or underbody and of proportions something like a melon pip, had further augmented the puzzlement in which they were held, and to puzzle the minds of simple folk is inevitably enough to arouse suspicion and distrust.

None had been permitted to examine this unusual craft of thirty and odd feet. Daytimes her two builders worked at her construction and nighttimes the little yard against which stood the cottage was guarded by a great ferocious dog of mongrel strains, mastiff and staghound or the like. Some, catching glimpse of the boat as she lay flatly on the skids with no keel or underbody, too heavy for oars and thus flat-bottomed, unadapted to the carrying of sail, had guessed vainly at her purpose. For the boats of the place had been from time immemorial of the same type, deep-bellied craft, with ample keel to grip the water.

So then, when on her launching they beheld her lying at the mooring with a strange rig, low sided, squat, the local boatmen shook their heads and wondered what mad theory had led her builders to think that she could hang upon the wind. Thus their amazement amounted almost to a consternation when they beheld her standing out in the teeth of a humming breeze, so close to the wind that her masthead pennant blew straight aft and no sign of leeway to the long low hull with its ample beam.

For although the Dutch lee-board was not unknown to them, the idea of a drop-keel encased amidships in the hull was a departure of shipbuilding which had never penetrated their sluggish minds. And the secret remained

unsolved to them as some few days later Lord O'Conor had come to the yard and put off in the mysterious craft with her builders when, circling the Osprey Reef, the boat had been seen to run with a free wind across a nearly naked shoal where any of the fisher folk could testify there was at that tide but a scant half-fathom of water. Thence rounding the promontory on a close reach, the boat had disappeared. Some days later the silent Horrockses had gone to take up their abode at the castle.

If truth were known O'Conor had been as greatly astonished at the demonstration as any of the fisher folk. The principle was new to him as was it to them. He had never seen a drop-keel nor had he heard of one, but his agile mind was quick to appreciate the possibilities of such a craft of large dimensions for shallow seas and flat-coast waterways and passages between the cays. It had needed but little of Master Horrocks's insidious suggestion to show him what use might be made of a vessel so constructed with a burden of some one hundred and fifty tons. First he had doubted the stanchness of it and weatherly qualities and facility of handling, all of which doubts had been put at rest by Ruderic's demonstrations both practical in his thirty-foot model, and theoretic in his designs.

From this had sprung the order for the building of the first big centerboard vessel which ever had sailed those or any other seas, a right-angled departure from all ideas of naval architecture and one which many score years later reached its perihelion when the American schooner-yacht *America* crossed the western ocean to England, lifted the Queen's Cup with ease in a southwesterly gale, and brought it back in triumph to remain uncaptured up unto the present period, though its defense now rests on still another distinct departure, the fin-keel.

It is small wonder then that his lordship was confident and elated at what he could not help but feel that, barring

mishaps of the sea, he would have a craft in which he could play hare and hounds with the policing squadrons of the Spanish Main. His schooner could make a laughing-stock of the sail-craft of the epoch. She could lie closer to the wind, by virtue of her great folding keel, sail faster from the lack of no cumbersome dragging underbody, "schoon" off before the wind like a skipping-stone, her keel reduced to nil, squatter over bar or flat or miles of shallow water where a tall man might walk shoulder deep, and if her mobile keel were to take the ground inch by inch its depth might be reduced at will. And there was always this invaluable advantage which O'Conor's crafty mind was quick to see, that looming high of normal free-board she must needs give to a pursuer the impression of a vessel of bulk and depth while yet being able to trick him because this bulk ceased within less than a fathom beneath the water's surface.

Although many of her wild crew of builders shook their heads at this violent attack on all precedent of naval architecture, the more intelligent were forced to admit its practicality and the intensity of interest to prove the results of the experiment and profit by them, had much to do with the zeal of their work. From time to time also they witnessed the evolutions of the little experimental model, kept strictly under guard, and there was many a hoarse terrific sea oath and slapping of corded thighs at the sight of the little model slipping out close-hauled in an ugly chop with never an inch of leeway when the fishing fleet were drifting off to leeward, and at sight of her squatting in like a frightened duck across the flats when the tide was out and fetching up on an even keel in eighteen inches water.

She was not of the "sharpie" or entirely flat-bottomed type, with the bottom planking laid straight across to the garboard streak, but carvel built with an abrupt curve to

her bilge and slightly rocker'd of keel, or more accurately trunk-log.

And so, with certain modifications, was destined to be the big vessel built upon her principles, with skag and rudderpost. In the water she would be scarcely distinguishable from any other vessel of her size, while her ample proportions would admit the carrying of enormous quantity of ballast to give her stability with an insignificant increase of her draught.

Ruderic, his business at the ropewalk completed, looked in at a sail-loft, where the canvas for the new ship was being cut and stitched. His business then completed he mounted his pony and rode back across the moor for O'Conor Hall. This ride led across the flat neck of a wide promontory steep where the sea had gnawed it out about the edges but the top of it a plateau of moorland with ridges and swales and here and there a peat bog. The road was merely a worn track and on either side of it was a waste country of whins and bracken, scarcely peopled, and the range of small shaggy cattle red-rimmed about the eyes.

Ruderic had got half way upon his route when against the gray bank of cloud which was a high fog, he turned up a gully and he saw outlined against the mist that was driving in from the sea another rider of the moor. It was Lady Sheila and Ruderic knew that she must have ridden to meet him.

Chapter IV

AS Ruderic approached, his pony and that ridden by the Lady Sheila showed a friendliness of greeting as though they would smooth the unfriendly relations of those bestriding them. Dogs do this often and so do children. But the effort was vain, as sometimes happens, for Ruderic did not draw rein until addressed by Sheila.

"Master Ruderic," said she. "I have ridden to meet you because I desire to speak with you."

"I am at your ladyship's service," Ruderic answered. He removed his cap and put it back again.

"Why do you not remain uncovered?" Sheila asked, sharply.

"Because I am not your serf, my lady, nor that of your father."

"You are insolent."

"Then insolent I shall remain," said Ruderic and gathered up his reins.

"I have said that I wish to speak to you," said Sheila.

"Your ladyship may speak," said Ruderic, "and I shall listen with all due respect."

"Then place your pony at the side of mine and let us ride slowly and talk a little," said Sheila. "Last night I eavesdropped."

"A serious fault," said Ruderic.

"A fault may be a virtue for knowledge gained. It is a poor fool that neglects an opportunity of information from the enemy. I learned a great deal from your conversation with my father."

“Then having learned it, why not keep it to yourself,” asked Ruderic.

“Because I desire to add to it. I shall now ask you why you so insist that this venture be an unlawful one. Why are you not content with the honest gains that should accrue?”

“Because,” said Ruderic, “half measures are not a part of my system of things. Why should one be hanged for a lamb when one may take a sheep or a herd of them.”

The two ponies were nuzzling, and as they consorted in this friendly measure, the saddles of the riders were crowded together and the flanks of the horses were rubbing, and they were making playful gestures.

“Now I shall say to you, my lady,” said Ruderic, “something which I strongly recommend that you do not forget.”

“I forget nothing,” murmured Sheila, “and I remember nothing which I desire to forget.”

“What I wish to say is this.” Ruderic edged away his pony with his heel. “My lord has some notion of taking pearls from Margarhita and persuading the Indians to trade him their gold from Darien, and even of trading with the priests and taking tithe of the yieldings beyond Progresso. But that on his part is veiled talk. I have not designed and am not building him a ship for any such faint-heart venture. I have reason to know that his lordship’s hatred of the English would be equal to my own if any fealty of his were put to the test.”

Sheila nodded. “We are none of us great English lovers in this region,” said she. “The English are masters but we are not slaves. Nevertheless if we are to make war on them, let us do it in open fashion and not by falling on their defenseless ships when we encounter them upon the high seas. Let us be warriors and not brigands, above all that worst of brigands which is a sea-thief.”

Ruderic surveyed her with an increase of respect. "That is for his lordship to decide," he answered.

"His lordship is decided," said Sheila, "but I desire to forfend his decision against your uncle's arguments and yours. I know nothing of your nature, but I cannot help but wonder why a man of your talents should not be content with their fulfillment. You are young, too young to have as yet any serious quarrel with humanity. Why should you desire to turn your uncommon abilities to the destruction of harmless folk who have done you no ill, and to seek to profit at their cost? Is there not enough to be come by honestly in this wide-open world?"

Ruderic fixed his tawny eyes upon her face. "I cannot answer those questions, my lady," he replied.

"Do you mean by that, that you do not wish to answer them?"

"To be frank," said Ruderic, "that is the truth, but that you may understand a little better the slant of my thought, I may say this. The inventor has ever the desire to see that which he invents function in its fullest measure, less for gain than as the right demonstration of his theorizing. Now let us say some man discovers a new force, an explosive, or dynamic resource. It occurs to him at once here would be the potency for a great engine of destruction, wherewith one might achieve the mastery not only of matter but of men, and, this thought gripping at the vitals of his mind, he cannot be content until he sees this brain child achieving such a purpose. This might lead him into the creation of a war, a small war or a great according to the potentialities of his discovery. Or, if this chance to be directed toward humanity's weal, he might then redeem the health and sanity of his neighbors, his country, or the world."

"You express yourself with logic, Master Ruderic," said Sheila, "but your argument cuts two ways, like a

sword of double edge. Why, then, should not your own invention be made to fructify for good instead of ill? A tempered blade can bite through armor, but why should it not serve also for the hewing of trees or the garnering of grain?"

"Ah, my lady," said Ruderic, "but there you have another factor to consider. The inventor looks ever to swifter results and more astonishing. He desires to see the maximum achievement of his genius and one to startle his fellow man. Now, if I were to have invented a pair of wings, I might serve myself of these to carry tidings from place to place like Hermes, the messenger of the gods. But it is not probable that such a useful measure would content me. Rather than that, the knowledge that I could defy the laws of gravity and pursuit and restraint, I would be more apt to swoop down like an osprey and seize some man's treasure or even such a maiden as yourself, and bearing you off in the rush of my strong pinions to some place remote, there possess myself of my booty at my pleasure."

A rush of blood swept over Sheila's face and her violet eyes darkened as they turned to Ruderic. But she controlled herself with some effort.

"There is not only insolence, but an unseemly threat in what you say. However, I can understand that you do but make an illustration. You would mean that in such a vessel as you have devised one might play the part of a great sea bird of prey, and help himself to this treasure and to maidens like myself and mock at all pursuit, and that to do this would more fully demonstrate the potency of your invention than the mere carrying of cargoes and other forms of useless, harmless traffic."

"Such is my thought," Ruderic assented, "and such also was the immediate thought of my lord, your father."

"But you would carry your project beyond his application of it," said Sheila, "and rather than trade in waters where such trade might be forbidden, you would strike harder and farther, and help yourself to the goods of other traders."

"Why not?" asked Ruderic, and fastened his golden eyes upon her face.

"Because it is wrong," she answered, hotly.

"And what have masterful men to do with right and wrong? What has such a man as I to do with such vain philosophies? What more do they matter to me than to yonder osprey, circling on broad pinions and ready to strike down a fish-laden cormorant winging to its nest? Does it matter to this sea eagle if its prey be a solent goose or French guillimot or Spanish kite, so long as its wings are stronger and talons more sharp and curved and polished, and beak tempered to the striking of a bigger, heavier fowl?"

"Then," said Sheila, her breath coming a little quicker, "you would advertise yourself an osprey, ruthless, rapacious, regardless of all human qualities of mercy and fair play?"

Ruderic nodded. "Such do I hold myself," he answered. "The quality of mercy or any other sense of ruth I do deny," and as he spoke a flaw of the rising breeze brought to their ears a shrill, quavering cry.

Chapter V

MOVED by the same impulse, Sheila and Ruderic reined in their ponies and turned their heads to listen. The skirts of the fog were now swirling in like smoke and the breeze had freshened. They were on a lonely part of the moor, but near the edge of the cliffs, and just ahead of them a fork in the road to the left led down to a little fishing hamlet where there was a shabby inn for the custom of the fisher folk, and patronized sometimes in their moments of leisure by the ill-set crew engaged in the building of the ship. At low tide they could make their way along the shingle at the foot of the cliffs, but for about three hours of the flood the passage was barred that way, and to reach the castle one had to mount the path which led up to the moor.

Now, at the sound of this tremulous cry which his trained ear told him was not that of any sea bird or the bleating of any lamb—though in fact there were no lambs to bleat at this season—Ruderic's mind leaped to a swift conclusion. The wailing cry, almost a shriek, came from a woman's throat, and could only have been given by one in some dire distress.

So, if some girl or woman were in danger or distress Ruderic knew that this could come only of evil human agency, and of such agency there was no lack in the gang of shipbuilders.

Perhaps the same thought had swept through the brain of Lady Sheila. She looked at Ruderic and, as their eyes met, it did not need audible speech to express their mutual conviction. The cry, like most sounds entangled

in the fog, was elusive of direction, and might have come from any quarter of the compass. But at that moment it rose again, this time in a shriek that was abruptly smothered.

"Over there," said Sheila, and pointed ahead to the right.

Ruderic spurred his pony forward and, coming to a spot where the bracken was cleft by a cattle track, swerved sharply into it, the Lady Sheila at his heels.

He rode perhaps the matter of a hundred yards when out of the swirling mists resolved a group of figures, less struggling than swaying, as of men unsteadied by drink, and who bore along some burden. The hoofs of Ruderic's pony clattered on the stones, and at the sound these figures stopped and turned, then shuffled to the side and sank down in the gorse.

Ruderic flung himself from the shaggy pony and ran forward.

"Oh, you scurvy louts!" he cried, and without pausing for reproach or parley was upon them in a whirl of blows. The Lady Sheila, sitting her pony and staring with a white face, became witness to the first act of fearsome violence which her eyes had yet beheld, but of such as the future was destined to present them with many yet to come.

There were three of the scoundrels whom at once she recognized as belonging to the unknown men gathered for the building of the ship, and, as they sprang back before Ruderic's assault, there rose up from the ground a young girl so fair and soft and tender and delicately moulded that she seemed to have no part or habit in that uncouth region. Her disordered hair was like new hemp, and her eyes were of the pure and tender blue of a cloudless sky in May. And the sweet features of her face were those rather of a little child than a well-grown girl, and the look in them, though for the moment filled with terror, held a sort of bewildered wonderment.

Sheila knew her at once as the daughter of a ship master, retired from the sea and owner of several of the larger fishing craft, a slow, mild-mannered man of middle-age, who, for some reason, had incurred the anger of O'Conor. She knew that her father had expressed displeasure on learning that this Master Benton resided in the place, and now she wondered if here by any chance could be some sinister form of persecution.

But there was no time for such vain speculation. The men struck down by Ruderic's driving fists, and doubtless sobered by the swift assault and one of a kind to which they were accustomed, had scrambled up like apes who, landing on all fours, make but a single movement of loss of equilibrium and the regaining of it. Besotted they might be, but the habit of the unstable deck was in their limbs, and many a fight upon its changing slope and headlong plunge into scuppers greased with blood and the squirmings as of cats to whip clear of the adversary and catch balance for a swift rush with fang and claw.

These claws were now bared, for in the hairy fist of each was a knife ground of edge and pointed; knives kept keen and polished with that instinctive sense of readiness which leads the boar, though rising mired and lousy to whet first his tusks against a tree. It seemed to Sheila that here was short shrift for Ruderic who faced his adversaries empty-handed, and her hand went to the butt of the horse pistol which her father had ordained be fastened always to her saddle-bow. The act was one of self-defense, as a leap of any of the agile ruffians might have reached her bridle rein before ever she could draw it to wheel and scamper off. It was borne in upon the Lady Sheila that here might happen a crime to which no witness would be let escape. She had scant concern for Ruderic, whom she believed herself to hate. Nor had she any interest in the girl.

The outcome of the business was so swift that the Lady Sheila was scarce able to follow that which happened. Ruderic swung low and his hands swept the ground. Something glinted through the fog-filled air, and the nearest man went down with the squawk of a stricken heron. Then, before his mates could thrust in to prevent, Ruderic was upon him, had grasped the knife as it fell from his outflung arm and, seizing the fellow by his shaggy hair, drew back his head and planted the blade to its haft in the side of the corded throat. He let fall the sodden clay and swung upon his startled mates.

"Whose turn next, my lambs?" he mocked.

The man nearest drew back apace. "Have a care, Master," he croaked. "I am Yellow Jack, and was known to all as the deadliest knife fighter in Vera Cruz."

"Then there must have been a sorry batch of vermin in Vera Cruz which, after all, is no great port," sneered Ruderic, and, stooping as before, snatched up the heavy mass of jagged flint with which he had bowled over his first victim.

"Now, which is to your taste, Yellow Jack, flint or steel?"

The man withdrew another step. "Hold hard, young Master," said he. "You will reckon with his lordship for this—Simon Peter, there, whom you have knifed was the right-hand man of his lordship."

"Good news, Jack," retorted Ruderic, "for, as I count myself on the honor of such rating, then here is a rival removed. Tell me, lad, am I not the better man?"

"You have proven yourself such, sir," mumbled the champion of Vera Cruz.

"You do well to say so," said Ruderic. "Now, wait for me there and we shall quickly see if I am not also a better man than the best knife fighter of Vera Cruz."

But the man flung down his knife and tugged at the

kerchief bound about his forehead. "I give your honor all respect," said he.

"And I likewise," growled his mate, and flung down his knife also.

"Then get you gone," said Ruderic, "and I shall deal with you later. We are not yet upon the Spanish Main, and by the time that we have got there I'll warrant to have the foul boiling of you where you belong."

The two made off across the moor. Ruderic picked up a tuft of moss, wiped off the knife and thrust it in his belt, then turned to the fair-haired girl, who was staring at him with the wide, wondering eyes of a child who happens on the killing of sheep or swine by the butcher.

"Have you suffered any hurt beyond the rough hauling of you here, Mistress May?"

She shook her head.

"Where did they seize you?" Ruderic asked.

"As I was coming from the town, sir. They fell upon me at the fork of the road. They came up from the village."

"You do unwisely to travel the road alone until this gang of ruffians shall have left the castle," said Ruderic. "Now come and I will see you safely home."

The girl obeyed in a dazed, bewildered way. Ruderic leading his pony took her by the elbow. As he passed the Lady Sheila who was sitting pale and silent, but with the same light poise which was a part of her, Ruderic saluted, albeit mockingly.

"I shall return soon to report this insignificant affair to his lordship," said he.

Sheila's straight brows drew low across her glowing eyes.

"You may be sure that it will need a strict accounting, young Master," said she.

Ruderic gave her a bleak smile. "Why as to that, my lady," he retorted, "there may be some who will wish to

know by what encouragement three of Lord O'Conor's ruffians brought here for the building of a ship, ever dared lay hands upon a decent maiden of this place," and with another bow Ruderic moved past Sheila, with May Benton leaning on his arm.

Chapter VI

LORD O'CONOR leaned back in his great chair, his elbows resting on its carven arms and the tips of his spread fingers touching lightly and held before his chin. There was a frown upon his dark, monk-like face, but it was the frown of one who ponders rather than of anger. At his right sat Master Horrocks in a high-backed and heavily upholstered chair, a prelate's chair with painted leather, brought from New Spain, where, for all one knows, it might have graced the presbytere of a church in Panama.

Across the table sat Sheila in a flowing gown of deep crimson velvet cut squarely open to show her full, flawless throat through the skin of which some light seemed to glow as though a taper were lit within her. The rays of this came also through her violet eyes and as these rested in turn on old Horrocks and her father it struck her how singular it was that two men could be so utterly dissimilar and yet so much alike.

For here was O'Conor, agile, supple, superbly if slenderly made, with shapely wrists and hands and narrow, well-poised head, high featured, forceful of lineaments and with a certain air of regal graciousness. And there against him Master Horrocks, massive, of bony frame, with the great knees and knuckles of a cart horse, big fingers gnarled and crooked, shoulders huge and hunched under his loose tunic in a way suggestive of a perched eagle, craggy head with high, rough-hewn features which were yet those of the scholar, and, in their perfect symmetry, of the man of birth.

The observant girl was impressed by the fact that these two men, so widely removed in station and habit and physical proportions, were yet possessed of some quality in common that so absorbed their personalities as to defy all dissimilarity and strike between them a powerful resemblance. This lay, perhaps, in expression which is the reflection of the soul. They seemed to be enveloped in that mutual atmosphere to be found in two specimens of handicraft by the same artisan. It entered the girl's examining mind that if the pair had been not living men but the portraits of such painted by the same master, there could have been no stronger proof that their delineation had been achieved by the same brush. It was as though a Velasquez had painted a portrait of a cavalier and a study called "The Master Craftsman" when, even though unsigned, any student of his work would have said, "these two are from the brush of Velasquez."

The talk was amicable, yet could not help but convey that veiled fencing to be found in the conversation of friendly diplomats who discuss affairs of diverse interest.

"I tell you, Master Horrocks," said O'Conor, "that I am less displeased at what has happened than sorely puzzled by it. Without boasting I may say that one of my few poor natural gifts has shown itself to be the faculty of reading men. But this young nephew of yours is a book written in a language that is beyond my learning."

"And yet at heart he is a lad of straight and simple nature, my lord," murmured Horrocks.

O'Conor smiled. "Perhaps that is the trouble," said he. "Who can see the wind, even though it blow a hurricane to wrench the spars out of the strongest ship? It is that which baffles me. If he were a man of mature age, wrought and tempered by the stress of fearful things, one might understand. But here we have a mere boy with the

mind of Archimedes and the passions of a pirate. Why these latter? What place have such terrific impulses in the bosom of youth? What deadly quarrel has he with his kind? Any impetuous boy of strength and courage and reckless brain might be englamored with the idea of free-booting whether on land or sea; to be a Robin Hood or a Viking or, striking closer, a Cortez or even Sir Henry Morgan, but this would be in theory. It would not walk hand in hand with him and blaze from his eyes at the slightest provocation. Nor does it march in step with his talents as a student."

"It may be, my lord," said Horrocks, "that we find in Ruderic a re-embodiment of the soul of some desperate adventurer, and that at times it possesses him despite a gentler reason."

O'Conor shrugged. "I have not much belief in such vague principles, having always held that each man is made in mind and body anew, from the beginning of him, in accordance with his learning and experience. The savage grows to his estate among savages, and absorbing their manner of thought and action, while the student must needs develop bookishly. It is to me a new experience to come upon one reared as a student and master craftsman and inventor, yet rent from the core of him by do themination and ferocity and intolerance of all self-restraint or that of others. He thrusts a knife into the throat of my best man and leaves him stark without compunction or apology, then tells me coolly to my face that a man should be consistent, and that if he is to deal with pirates he had best commence by handling them as such. 'But we are no pirates,' I protest. 'That man was,' says he, 'and would be still were he alive.' And he has the impudence to ask me point blank why the men speak of me amongst themselves as Black O'Conor, and when and where I sailed with Simon Peter as my bo'sun."

Sheila moistened her lips. "And you supported it," said she.

O'Conor smiled. "Troth, and I would support more than that from Ruderic," said he, "because in my heart I know that he is right, and I am a just man. It would need no wizard to perceive that this gang of ours is the devil's own crew, and I make no secret from Master Horrocks and his nephew that, sailing from my plantation in the Carolinas, I have at times found need to step some few paces outside the arbitrary laws which attempt to govern the conduct of those trading in and about the Antilles. For this reason my crews were chosen from such men as Yellow Jack and Simon Peter and several others of their ilk. But that does not say that I now purpose to fit out as a corsair, if for no better reason than that I have other fish to fry."

"Might it not be just as well, my lord," said Horrocks, in his cavernous voice, "to tell us straightly just what species of fish these may be?"

O'Conor laughed. "Well, then, old sea dog," said he, "know that among others are black fish."

Horrocks's scraggy face was spread for an instant with an expression of disgust.

"Not slaves!"

"Why yes," said O'Conor, gently. "Black slaves."

Horrocks let fall his heavy fist upon the table. "Then I have the honor to resign my office," said he, "and my nephew with me. We shall engage ourselves in no such foul traffic."

"Listen," said O'Conor in his silken voice, "I am in no mind to go a-slaving to the coast of Africa, but on my plantation I have imperative need of an army of blacks for the clearing of the rice fields and the building of great dikes and the hewing and dressing of loblolly trees to build the trunks or water gates which control the

flooding of a system of fields. It is a labor that can be accomplished only by the Congo blacks who are able to resist the fever which infests the region, and to purchase these slaves in the markets of Carolina is too costly a business even for my purse. But there are places in the Antilles which are the rendezvous of slave ships from Africa, and at these the blacks may be had for a quarter what they fetch in our market. There is then the danger of running them up through the Bahamas and along the coast of Florida to our river mouth. But with such a vessel as we are building, I feel the risk to be practically removed."

Horrocks stared at the table with clouded brows. "It is not much of a venture," he grumbled.

"None could be more profitable," said O'Conor, "especially since I do not purpose to traffic in these blacks, but merely to augment an acreage for rice and cotton which even at this moment yields me rich revenues. I can buy prime blacks of Jean Lafitte at Barataria for a dollar a pound, an average price of about one hundred and forty dollars a head. In the open market I should have to pay anywhere from five hundred to a thousand dollars apiece. These blacks are for the most part smuggled across through the swamps for fear of capture by government ships, but with such a vessel as ours, think of the time and money to be saved. The kaffles are now driven up the Escambia River, thence through Georgia, a long and arduous route with always the risk of capture. But if our vessel proves what we hope we may slip past these watchdogs at our leisure."

"I had understood," said Horrocks, "that the law against the landing of slaves in the southern states was a dead letter, and the enforcement of it a farce."

"One year it may be so, and the next it may not be," snapped O'Conor. "The different States draw up these

acts to enforce them for awhile, then suddenly, through some influence of legislature, repeal them. A plantation owner like myself never knows just where he stands, except in this respect that while the up country cotton growers are able to manage in some fashion, we rice planters of the coast must depend absolutely on the blacks, and special ones at that, those fetched from the Congo and the Niger and, to some extent, immune from fever. Georgia prohibited slavery from its first colonization, and has since discovered that it cannot do without it. But this much is certain, that it is only a question of time, and no long time, before the importation will be forbidden the length of the coast, and it is imperative that I secure my quota before this happens."

Horrocks scowled. "It is at best a filthy traffic," said he, "and a hideously cruel one. I agree with Granville Sharpe, who so strongly opposed it in England."

"And I," said O'Conor, quickly, "with Dana of Connecticut, who declared that the petition for the revision of the laws relating to the slave trade was—'nothing but a farrago of the French metaphysics of liberty and equality'—and Brown, of Rhode Island, who declared: 'Why should we see Great Britain getting all the slave trade to themselves? Why may not our country be enriched by that lucrative traffic?' At this moment there is a ban upon the importation of slaves into South Carolina, and I learn that the enforcement of it is rigid. So, considering this to be an arbitrary law and against the interest of the low country planter and the development of the country, I propose to evade it as best I may, and as you are familiar with those waters I shall make it well worth your while to serve me as pilot."

"I know those waters well," said Horrocks. "There is perhaps to-day no better pilot of them than myself, especially in and about the Bahamas. I was navigator for

Lafitte and sailed with three other of his contemporaries. I learn that all these waters are now well policed by swift-sailing British ships. If cornered, would you fight?"

His deep-sunk eyes glowed at O'Conor who laughed and struck the table a ringing slap.

"But we shall not be cornered, old mastiff. If this vessel of ours proves all that I expect of her we can make of them a laughingstock. Never have I seen sweeter lines in any hull. Her run is like the breast of a seal, and her bilges full but gentle, and her stern will drag no more dead water after it than the hinder end of a duck. Ruderic's genius has modified her from the model, so that she has keel enough to work fairly on the wind without her great centerboard which, when down, must enable her to look it in the eye. But best of all, her draught should be less than half that of any vessel of her size, and herein lies an advantage impossible to estimate. But mind you, Master Horrocks, it is principally her speed on which I count, and her ability to hold at least two points closer to the wind than any other sailing craft afloat."

A flush had spread on his high cheekbones as he spoke, and the gleam in his eyes was to some extent reflected in those of the master craftsman at this praise in which he shared with his apprentice. For there is perhaps no greater response of the emotions than that of the builder and inventor to faith in and lauding of his handicraft, especially when this be a bold departure from all established precedent.

The subtle O'Conor was quick to follow up the advantage gained. "In token of such genius, I could find it in my heart to forgive young Ruderic anything," he cried. "Should his creation prove all that I expect of it, as I am convinced it must, I shall refuse him nothing that he asks. He may be full partner in this venture. Should his temper find need of such outlet he has my sanction

to slaughter these rascals I have assembled to the last man Jack of them. And I shall say more:" he leaned forward and fixed the shipwright with his lambent eyes. "You may say to Ruderic that should fitting opportunity offer, he may gratify his lawless craving to cut out some fat Spaniard, or other ship, and relieve her of her golden freight. But, if such is his ambition, he had best save a few of those who have made such traffic as well as slaving their profession and know its method."

There came from Sheila a sudden movement, a flutter like that of a bird startled on its perch. She drew her breath quickly with a swelling of bosom and parting of lips and sudden lifting of long lashes that habitually half-screened her eyes. But O'Conor seemed to catch and hold her with a swift, warning glance.

Horrocks did not see this byplay. He was studying the ruby lights in the cut-glass decanter on the table in front of him, and he seemed to be weighing the worth of what he had just heard.

"That is a little better, my lord," said he, "and, hopefully, my lad may be content with it. But there is one more thing which I shall make bold to say, trusting that no offense be taken." He raised his massive head and looked at Sheila with a boldness and directness of gaze that held in it no disrespect.

"Since we are to be shipmates out across the western ocean to your plantation in the Carolinas, my lady," said he, "would it not be better for the peace of all if you were to give over treating Ruderic with scorn?"

It was as though this speech was a draught of air, and Sheila's face the ember on which it blew. Her lashes seemed to unfold and widen their intervening space like the wings of a butterfly, purple of back, then as she met the unyielding gaze of old Horrocks, the embers seemed to cool again.

"He asked for my scorn with his insolence," said she, "and what, pray, does it matter if he gets it?"

"It matters this, my lady," said Horrocks, slowly. "There has come lately some devil to inhabit Ruderic. Perhaps the fervor of his work has left ajar the doors to his seething soul. Your treatment of him inflames this genii, and I fear daily lest some savage impulse blight all our plans. He would be capable in a gust of rage of running foul our gang of workers whom he loathes or setting torch to the ship or other mad act."

"God forbid!" breathed O'Conor.

"It is unlikely such Deity is strongly allied with us, my lord," said Horrocks, dryly. "Perhaps we should do better to count on the patronage of that other."

A spasm seemed to cross the face of O'Conor and its chromic pallor took a lighter hue. Sheila crossed herself with a shudder.

"Let us not blaspheme, Master Horrocks," said O'Conor, and served himself a glass of wine.

Chapter VII

PERHAPS the Lady Sheila found some reason in the advice so boldly offered her by Horrocks, or perhaps O'Conor, startled at the idea of his venture going up in smoke, may have admonished her. Doubtless his war chest held less than he liked to think about, and the adventure taxed its resources, so that to have seen the vessel a hecatomb for her builders was a prospect which dismayed him.

Or again, the Lady Sheila may have desired to infuse some new element of mischief in a situation not precisely free of such, or been tempted to seek revenge in the classic feminine way of kindling a flame of passion at which in her own good time she might fling contempt and mockery.

Be the motive what it might, as Ruderic was calculating strains and stresses to estimate the girth of spars and spread of shrouds and weight of chain plates required for the vessel, there came at the window of the cottage a curious flapping and fluttering and mewing, precisely as though some sea bird, adrift in the dark and attracted by the light within, had pitched against it and was confused and troubled by the glare.

It was an hour after nightfall of a still, warm autumn evening, such as would in America be known as Indian summer. There was a soft haze without which, when the moon arose, would become a witch mist hanging over bog and fen, and the air was sweet with moorland smell. Ruderic, deceived at the noise and disturbed by it, rose from the deal table at which he was seated, and, going to

the open door, was about to capture the silly bird and set it on its way when he found himself confronted by the grotesque Lanty, who was ducking and smiling and flapping his big hands as if in apology for his little joke.

"You are in the wrong employment, my friend," said Ruderic, in no way vexed. "You ought to be a mountebank and go from fair to fair and give your mimicries. Think of the money that would come pouring into your hat."

Lanty looked up at the sky which was already lightening and diffusing the refracted rays of the great, full moon. Then, in the curious way he had of delivering a summons, as though he were himself a passive transmitter through whom one heard the original command, he said, in such perfect mimicry of Sheila's throaty voice that Ruderic was startled into looking on either side him for the speaker, "I am waiting here at the end of the rose garden and would speak with Master Ruderic if he will condescend to grant me this courtesy."

"What is this, Lanty?" Ruderic asked, for he had not seen the girl since he had left her on the moor to take May Benton safely home, nor had he thought to have any further speech with her.

The uncanny fellow chuckled. Then, leaning forward with one of his swift gestures that the eye could scarcely follow, he seized Ruderic's hand and, bowing low, kissed the back of it, then pressed it suddenly against his heart. "Wirra! Masther Ruderic," said he. "And why should you be afther hatin' milady who bears you no ill will but is sore hurted at your rough tratement of her. Sure Lanty loves you like a dog his master, for have ye not befriended him and kept thim divils from baitin' him sore at ivery chance."

"Simon Peter, at least, will not torment you any more, Lanty," said Ruderic, grimly.

A shudder swept through Lanty as always happened at sight or mention of violence and strife. Even a harsh word or blaze of anger was enough to put his sensitive nature in terrified turmoil.

"'Twas an awful deed, that, Master Ruderic," said he, "and a fate I would not wish aven for so crool a man as him. But he is gone, and may the Blessed Saints show mercy on his black sowl." He crossed himself—then continued in his curiously musical voice. "Now listen, sor, Lanty loves you because ye are kind beneath, and Lanty loves his sweet mistress, and he would be afther seein' you two good friends. Did you not just hear a wild birrd flutterin' at the closed window of your room? So do I think there may be such a wild birrd wishful to flutter at the closed window of yer hear'r?"

"Are you mad, Lanty?" Ruderic demanded. "The Lady Sheila hates me as I hated this dog of a Simon Peter the moment I clapped eyes on him. You are a fool, Lanty, but what is the truth of this message of hers?"

"'Tis better to learn truth than have it tould you, sor," said Lanty. "Wherefore do you go now to the rose garden and seek it for yourself," and before Ruderic could speak, he had flitted off with the shapeless flight of a bat or night hawk.

Puzzled and in scornful wonder of what trap might now be set for him, Ruderic extinguished his tapers and walked up the winding path to the castle. He passed around it and came presently upon a sort of terrace on a bold jutting cliff which dropped sheer to the beach below. Here were the rose gardens which once had been the pride of the O'Conors, so that the simile, "Lovely as an O'Conor rose," had become accepted throughout that wild county as the acme of expression in praise of a girl's beauty.

Sheila's first care on coming to O'Conor Castle had been

the reclamation of these rose gardens, the restoring of the terrace and of the wall which sheltered it from the northwest wind. There were late roses in full bloom, and the dampness of the night furnished a vehicle for their aroma. The sweetness of this perfume, mingled with that of the moor, was in Ruderic's nostrils as he drew near the entrance. The night throbbed with lunar color and thrilling odors and sounds elusive and sweet of the sea whispering in the grottos and caverns at the foot of the cliffs. It was a night in which it was as hard to be a hater as it might be difficult to refrain from playing the lover, and Ruderic was fighting the glamor of it and steeling his senses against what some instinct told him must be an insidious assault upon his hatred, when he strode through the gateway of the garden and saw dimly a white figure beneath a bower at its farther end.

His heart was thumping in a fashion new to it as he turned his steps that way and, coming to the entrance of this fragrant nest, halted with a bow.

"Your ladyship desires to speak with me?" he asked, "or was Lanty playing one of his pranks?"

The Lady Sheila moved to the doorway of the bower, and, raising her hand, laid it on the trellis. She wore a white gown caught above the hips with a girdle which pointed downward to fasten with a jeweled buckle, and, as her arm was lifted, the sleeve flowed back from it.

"I sent for you, Master Ruderic," said she, "because I have an obligation to perform, whether pleasant or the reverse depends entirely upon yourself. I have never shirked my duty and so although it hurts my pride to do so, I am bound to offer you apology."

"For what?" asked Ruderic, bluntly, set aback by the straitness of this speech and the quiet dignity in which it was delivered.

"For a misconception of your character and a lack of

appreciation of your worth and principle. Your talents I have admitted from the first."

"And why should you thus alter your opinion of me?" Ruderic asked.

"Because your late behavior has shown me my stupidity. I have been fool enough to read you wrongly and accept your portrayal of yourself as a man of wolfish heart."

"Troth my lady," said Ruderic, much astonished, "but it seems to me that you have more than ever reason to cleave to such opinion."

"I have not," said Sheila. "I know you now for what you are despite your professed desires."

"And what may that be?" Ruderic demanded.

"Why, then," said Sheila, "the soul of chivalry and with all a man of heart. You have betrayed yourself, Master Ruderic. You urge my father to become a pirate and argue for a course of utter ruthlessness. You tell me in no gentle terms that with the cold-bloodedness of the inventor you desire only to see your invention demonstrate itself in the fullest measure at the cost of you care not whom. You proclaim yourself an osprey which has no reck for the quality of its prey. You say that if, for instance, you were to have discovered means of flying, like this predatory bird, you might swoop down upon myself and carry me to some remote place as your prize—" She gave a low, rippling laugh in which was no hint of mockery, "and to all this argument of yours I gave ear and belief and hated you for a rapacious monster of no soul or, if such, one of pure evil. You demand harshly and with scant politeness for consistency of purpose—and you the most inconsistent of all men."

"I do not understand, my lady," said Ruderic, slightly bewildered.

"Of course you do not understand," said Sheila, "be-

cause you do not understand yourself, forsooth. You believe yourself to be at heart a gory pirate, whereas you are in fact a very knight-errant."

The meaning of this discourse began to dawn on Ruderic's mind which was, when all is said, keener for mathematics than for metaphysics or other philosophy.

"Your ladyship has reference to my rescue of the maid?" he asked.

"What else, dear saints?" demanded Sheila. "To you, storming along with your hymn of hatred, comes the cry of a woman in distress, whereat promptly your false philosophy takes flight and you rush to the rescue and slay incontinently the first rascal, and would serve the other two in like fashion though they be picked men for the venture which you so strongly urge. You a pirate? You a Blackbeard or Sir Henry Morgan—" her voice was tenderly deriding. "Master Ruderic, no matter how angry you may get, or how insolent or how scornful, you can never deceive me again. I know you for what you really are, which is a Sir Launcelot du Lac, and so I have sent for you to make you my apology," and, gathering the hem of her flowing skirt in either hand, she made him a sweeping courtesy, stepping clear of the arbor so that the moon now risen flashed upon her gleaming neck and throat and seemed to place a silvered nimbus about the thick mass of her hair.

Ruderic found himself completely taken aback. The knowledge of what he had in store for her made it outrageous that she should hold him in this high opinion. It was an essential part of his revenge that hatred should exist between them to the bitter end, and yet there was truth, which could not be denied, in what she said.

Angry, and with mind slightly confused, he tried now to redeem his false character of villain, and, in so doing, got deeper in the mire of high conduct, which bog is no

very frightful one, but rather like a spongy bit of fragrant meadow sown with flowers among which skylarks nest.

"You do not understand," said he, vexedly. "You have failed to read the business aright. I cared nothing whatsoever for this girl or what befell her. It was the lack of obedience to orders that enraged me, for strict injunction had been laid upon these dirty rogues to leave the folk here unmolested. Besides, I hated this rascal who has been from the first a surly brute under the protection of your father. I cared not a farthing how much your father might disapprove my act."

"Now there, Ruderic, you would rant off again," said Sheila, soothingly, "and there again are you inconsistent. In one breath you prate of discipline and in the next you scorn it, for is not my father the captain of this expedition and you his lieutenant or mate or whatever term may suit you? And by this time you should know the high esteem in which my father holds you and which no act of yours could alter. Do you wish to hear what he said to Master Horrocks on this subject?"

"No," growled Ruderic, feeling himself floundering deeper in her toils. "I have no such desire."

"Then shall you hear," said Sheila, smoothly, "unless you turn and bolt or lay those strong hands of yours upon my throat and strangle back my speech. He said that your creation was a marvel and that he could not find it in his heart to refuse anything to its inventor." Her low laugh trilled in the same cadence as the voice of a nightingale beginning its improvisation. "He did not say in so many words that this reward would reach the degree of giving you his daughter, but no doubt he was well aware that such bounty would be your last desire."

"Your ladyship forgets herself," said Ruderic, thickly.

"Then I do so purposely," said Sheila. "The knowledge of my error in your regard has been vouchsafed me in full

measure. Old Horrocks tells us that you are, like himself, of lowly origin, but old Horrocks lies. He lies doubly because it must be evident to any person of discrimination that he is not of lowly origin himself. He is a scholar, albeit of the School of Satan," and her bare arm flashed again in the moonlight as she crossed herself and shot a furtive glance about her.

"You would do better to believe him," said Ruderic, sullenly, for this interview was progressing in any direction but the one he sternly told himself he most desired.

"I must believe what I must rather than what I may or may not choose," Sheila answered. "Master Horrocks has doubtless been the pirate which he declares, but before that he was a scholar of no small attainments. He had also knowledge of astronomy and science, and he has caused you to be educated in like manner, else you could never have achieved that which you have done. Your speech may be rough but it is polished, and there is nothing lowly either in your blood or in your nature. I know not what the secret of your birth may be, but this at least I know, that it was gentle even though you yourself are not. I hold you as my equal, Ruderic, though for aught I know you may be my better, and no matter what your treatment of me, or your feeling for me, I shall never hate nor hold you in contempt again."

Ruderic with some effort gathered himself in hand. "I warn your ladyship," said he, "that you make vain effort to beguile me."

Sheila clapped her hands softly before her bosom. "Dear me!" said she. "Listen to the young Master. Stop and think, Ruderic. Can there be any beguilement in such straight talk as mine? I can look into you as clearly as one looks at the rocks on bottom from the top of the cliffs when the sea is smooth. Your nature is frank and open as the scape of ocean on a clear day when one

may follow the horizon in its whole circumference and discover without the aid of deep learning that the earth is round. But old Horrocks is a subtle man who has been tricked by some evil agency into arguments of anti-Christ and, beginning when your mind was callow, he has instilled it with these and made of you what is worse than any heretic, which is an infidel. But mark me, Ruderic, some day you will come into your own and know that God is good and most of his children also—" She drifted closer and laid her small, white hand upon his sleeve, and Ruderic could no more make effort to shake it off than he could tear his eyes from the glowing ones which looked up into them. "You are a soul in distress, Ruderic," said she.

Whatever the general truth of this, there is scant doubt but that there were throes of torture in Ruderic's breast at that moment. It seemed to him that the very pith of his revenge, to the accomplishment of which his whole being had been centered from childhood, was now in danger of destruction. Hammers were beating in his temples, his heart was laboring, and every nerve and fiber was straining at its leash. He could feel that hatred so carefully nurtured and tended draining away just as when one grips a handful of very fine, dry sand and seeks to hold it, when the more powerful the grip the faster the tiny stream from the core of what is so vainly held. Sheila, as though sensing the nearness of victory, moved a little closer so that her bosom brushed slightly his chest and the scent of her breath and hair mingled with the perfumes of the place, and her eyes seemed to glow and coalesce.

"When will you come into your own, Ruderic?" she murmured.

Her voice roused him with a sudden fierce resistance. His powerful hands fell upon the full roundness of her arms, and he thrust her back and stood, panting, and with a sudden rime of sweat glistening upon his forehead.

"All in my own good time, girl," said he between his teeth, and could not help but add, as though the words were wrenched from him, "when that comes I shall not be beholden to the bounty of my lord O'Conor."

And turning on his heel he strode back for the gate of the garden in what seemed to be a fog obscuring the face of the treacherous moon.

Chapter VIII

THE ship was ready for launching and, among the crew of builders, even those who first had scoffed and given voice to disbelief in the practicality of such a craft, her stability and other weatherly qualities, now regarded the graceful fabric with admiration and a sort of wonder.

Master Horrocks and Ruderic were seated on a balk of timber awaiting the arrival of O'Conor. There was, for a rare moment, the stamp of a tranquil satisfaction on the face of the master craftsman, as though for a space he had laid aside the dark passion which obsessed him and granted to his mind the recreation of worthy pride and craftsmanly content.

The workmen too, now that their travail was completed, gave curious impression as of surveying it for the first time instead of for the last in its entirety. They strolled about the long hull, appearing to discover charms and excellencies which had blossomed undiscovered, and there was this amusing quality about their final overhauling of the vessel, that they seemed surprised to think that they themselves had built her, that their thick hands and thicker heads possessed the quality of hewing out so beautiful a fabric. No one of them who would admit that his part had been of less importance than his mate's, and yet no one of them could quite get it through his head that no other hands had been hereon engaged than his roughed paws and those of others like him. So that while giving all due credit to the architect and master builder, each man felt that he himself must actually have built

the ship, this to his astonishment and profitable increase of self-esteem.

Old Horrocks watched them in grim amusement, yet thoughtful withal.

"Never have any of the rascals beheld a ship's hull of such gently flowing lines and gracious curves," said he to Ruderic. "Nor for the matter of that do I believe that anything approaching her has been constructed since the Vikings built their long ships. But those galleys were designed for speed and sea-worth with no expectation of working under sail against the wind. When it blew ahead, the sturdy Norsemen hauled down their sail and manned the oars, and were it a hard gale they rode it out lying to a drag.

"But here we have a vessel which should beat into the teeth of any but the strongest tempest, and in which the leeway of other ships would be so great that their day's work would be more apt to show loss than gain upon their course."

"It is a strange thing," mused Ruderic, "that no man of the many who have studied the principles of ship construction should have discovered that which is the very pith of the problem; working the resistance of the water against the force of the wind so that the vessel squeezed between the two may slip from the opposing pressures in the line of least resistance, and with the utmost ease, which is by passing the water under her sloping body rather than in jamming it aside like a wedge driven into a log."

"Aye," agreed Horrocks. "For some reason, difficult to understand, the conventions of the sea are ever the last from which folk dare depart. There are many types of ship—the huge Spanish galleons, high-pooped and offering tremendous windage against which their round bottoms offer no grip upon the water, so that a hurricane

may waft them at its will. And the clumsy bowls of the Dutch, though in the case of the smaller ones, which work in shallow waters like the Zuyder Zee, are under more control by reason of their bungling leeboards. Then there are the massive French and British merchantmen and men-of-war like solid blocks of oak which by virtue of their weight can, when laden, hang upon the wind, but of speed so sluggish that when hauled into the vortex of the doldrums and Sargasso Sea, where the breezes are light or lacking, they may drift for many days until their water grows foul and gelatinous and their crews perish miserably of drought or scurvy.

"The liveliest vessels to-day," said Ruderic, "are the feluccas of the Mediterranean, with their lofty lateen sails, but their rig is not practicable for a large vessel, so they do not leave their sea. The French and British luggers are smart sailors, but the short, steep Channel chop makes imperative the heavy underbody with bluff bows to save their pounding, and that they be not washed fore and aft. Yet such a ship as ours should prove neither a wet boat nor yet pound greatly forward, by virtue of her flare and rake of bows and the length of run which enables her to pass a sea well aft before feeling its concussion, then cleaving the water to fling its bulk on either side."

"Your centerboard," said Horrocks, "is rather of convenience than necessity. But even where the waters are deep one may easily appreciate the tremendous advantage in having the friction of progress in the light and mobile surface water which is easily displaced rather than the dense and heavy deeper water stubbornly resisting to give way."

"It all amounts to this, Uncle," said Ruderic, "a choice between going over or through. By means of our centerboard we profit in the resistance of the deeper water without being obliged to displace it for the gaining of this same resistance. Some day I shall invent a vessel with

no reference to draught, yet having the same flat flooring to her hull which shall curve into a deep narrow keel, with some ponderous weight of metal secured to its extremity where by its leverage it may endow her with the maximum stability."

Old Horrocks nodded. "A fin as it were," said he, "and with a fusiform weight of lead or iron which may serve as a cant-lever to oppose the pressure of her sails."

It lacked not many minutes to the full of the flood tide when they were to launch the ship, not for need of ample water but because such is the time-honored custom. O'Conor and his daughter had not yet come down to the beach, but the workers and castle folk were gathered about in groups, and a cask of Canary wine (which had paid no tithe) was set up, though was not yet broached, awaiting the ceremony.

A square-jawed man, with nose askew and face scarred like the head of a fighting dog, strolled up to where Horrocks and Ruderic were sitting on the balk of timber. He hitched his baggy trousers, which fell in loose folds over a bulging calf, and cocked his reddened eye at the pair. Plainly, from the distended veins across his forehead and the fiery glow of his many scars, he had not greatly delayed his drink for the launching of the ship.

"Now 'ere is wot a man may call a proper wessel, marsters," said he. "I will not say 'ow I liked 'er at the start, but she 'as my money on 'er for the finish."

"And you no longer think she'll tear out her belly fin if hit by a sudden squall, Dirk?" Ruderic asked.

The man spat and wagged his head. "Why as for that, Marster Ruderic," said he, "the fin can fetch away no more than can the rudder bend, because it be joined with iron rods in like fashion. And the trunk in which it slides must hold unless the ship were to split in two the length of 'er, which same cannot happen because of all that is

'olding of 'er together. 'Twould be like a man's hi'stin' of hisself on deck by 'is boot tops, which same 'as never been managed to my knowledge."

"And will she carry her sail?" asked Horrocks, a twinkle in his deep-set eyes.

"Like a church its steeple, sir. Mark ye the full bilges of 'er, like the 'ips of a Margate fishwife. Yet fore and aft they run into meltin' lines as sweetly tapering as the arms and legs of a Romany lass. Her bow and stern belie the middle of her, and she should scoon on the surface of the water like a mallard drake in chase of the duck, his true love. There is, in a manner of speaking, my marsters, less shock to her fore and after parts than lies in the love-slap of a sweetheart. There is naught to thrust away the water which, by virtue of her maidenly bosom, must glide from it as from that of a swimming Fiji Island girl. Here is no bluff-breasted wave-churn say I, but as she is rightly named, or is soon to be, *Hirondelle*, which is, I take it, the French for swallow. She will fly breast to breast with the sea."

He rolled away and Horrocks looked at Ruderic with affection. "They have all come round to such admission of your braincraft, lad," said he. "Dirk was at first the worst grumbler of the lot. Such is the inspiration to come of honest hate."

"But it was not such, Uncle," Ruderic protested. "To speak truth I was near forgetting my hatred and my vow when this invention was fermenting in my head."

Horrocks frowned. "It is true that the adapting of it to our ends was my own thought. I was quick to see how such a vessel might lure our enemy into the net and deliver him into our hands. But the Nemesis vouchsafed proceeds directly through your agency, even though such process may be hidden from us. Tell me, lad," his sunken eyes with that buried gleam which seldom left them

rested searchingly on Ruderic, "does not your hatred burn more brightly as the day of reckoning draws closer?"

"Yes, Uncle," Ruderic answered, somberly.

"You do not feel yourself to weaken under his daughter's wiles?"

Ruderic's eyes shot out their golden flame. He clenched his fist. "If such a thing be possible," he said in the voice of one put to some ingenious torture, "I hate that sly cat better than I do the man who made a scapegoat of my father to gain possession of his wife and his estates."

"She no longer hates you, lad."

"Then shall she before I have finished with her. She shall know this when I have served her as my mother was, and cast her off. But before this Black O'Conor, as you say he was known when in the slave trade, shall have been the sport of carrion crows."

Horrocks's fanatical expression showed content. He laid his hand on Ruderic's shoulder.

"That is as it should be, dear lad. But have a care that you do not betray yourself. Bide your time until the hour strikes."

He rose and moved away for a final look at the greasing of the skids and ways. Then, a fantastic figure which had been fluttering about, juggling with the rounded flints and mimicking the terns, drew near to Ruderic. A sweet voice, like a child's, rose in a plaintive little chantey of minor key:

"Fair ye well little ship, and where d'ye go. . . .

Away to the isles where the love-winds blow.

Saints be with ye, fair ship, and what do ye there?

I gather a cargo of sorrow and care.

And can ye then load no better freight?

I was built of curses and blood and hate.

Then woe to ye ship and g' me your ear

Aye woe to me child, and what shall I hear?

Do ye slither your cargo into the sea, and a shipload of love
bring back to me."

Ruderic turned with a frown, at sight of which Lanty rolled over on his back and began to paw and whine and whimper like a puppy to the infinite relish of the waiting groups.

"Now why," demanded Ruderic, "do you sing me such a song?"

"Sure it was the ship and me conversin', Master Ruderic."

"And do you then not relish the mission of this ship?"

"I relish it as would I be relishin' to see a child of your honor's mountin' the steps of the gallows, which the saints forfend. For is not the ship child of yours?"

"Child of my mind, Lanty," Ruderic answered, heavily.

The poor creature swarmed up to sit before him cross-legged on the shingle, and looked at Ruderic with wild, eager eyes.

"And where is the difference 'twixt mind and sowl, master. So the ship bein' the child of your soul is thus a dearer thing than a child of the flesh. And yet ye would be sendin' her on a mission of deadly sin."

Ruderic eyed him with sudden, stern suspicion. "What sin?" he demanded.

"The sin of hate, sor, which is the very worst of all the deadly sins."

Ruderic leaned forward and seized him by the wrist, which he could never have accomplished had Lanty seen fit to evade him.

"Have you been eavesdropping, rascal?"

Lanty shook his head. "And is there nade to eavesdrop to the voice when the eyes are thunderin' maledictions?" he whimpered. "Oh, master o' me. There is too much hatred in this wurld, and scarcely any love at all. Now I will whisper something in your honor's ear that was whispered me be a little birrud. Ye do be standin' daily in a perishin' shower of love as pure and burnin' as a

flame. Love is fair drenchin' ye, and rowls off yer black armor of hate."

Ruderic rose angrily to his feet. "Get ye gone, ye zany," said he, roughly. "And mind you," he went on in a low, furious voice. "If you betray me by any of your fool's chatter you shall swing like a pennant from this vessel's truck until you rot and drop from the noose!"

And at the tawny blaze which poured from his eyes Lanty fell backward as though struck, and lay quivering and trembling while the fools amused by this play, little recking that the sensitive creature was really smitten to the core, roared with laughter at this mimicry of one struck down by the falling sickness.

Presently O'Conor and his daughter came down to the beach and, the tide being at full flood, the ceremony of launching was begun. None but Ruderic observed the terrible expression on the countenance of Horrocks as the ship was blessed by the priest, for O'Conor displayed all the gestures of a good Catholic.

Men were then placed to saw the buck-straps which held the skids, while the Lady Sheila, standing with her father and Master Horrocks on a pulpit against the starboard bow, held in her hand a flagon of the sparkling wine of Champagne with which to christen the vessel.

There is a double significance to the launching of a ship which is invested with the dual qualities of birth and wedding. The fabric glides from the shore which gave it birth into the embrace of the sea, its husband and lover. No matter that it be a rough husband and one of many wives, brutal in certain moods, and in others caressing, yet her place is on its bosom, and she may force it to her purpose and make freedom of its domain. The ship leaves the land a good deal as an infant is born, charged with the soul of her builders, a babe while yet a bride,

with all the troubles and perplexities ahead which are the babe's inheritance, with all the joys and sorrows and tragic circumstance which awaits the bride who weds a tyrant. No man can say what the future may hold in store for her, whether of good or ill, of duties faithfully performed in a service honorable and replete with profit or in one which may be sinister, shameful, vicious, and paying in the end the penalty of her wrongdoing.

There are mother ships, and there are courtesan ships, and there are valiant ships, and treacherous, accordingly as their careers are destined. But there must always be an emotion at the launching of a ship because of this very uncertainty.

So now there passed through the little throng a quickening of pulses, as there came a snapping sound and the ship began to move. The ways were long and rather steeply pitched and, as the graceful hull sped onward with gathering momentum, a lusty cheer burst from the throats of the watchers. Her tapering stern slid into the water with scarcely more disturbance of it than an otter slipping down its slide. She freed herself of her encumbrances as a bride flings aside her veil and, with a gurgling kiss, swam out upon the bosom of her lover.

Then, contrary to the manner of most ships, instead of checking she seemed to gather way, swimming on and on as though propelled by some invisible force. A cry of astonishment rose from the watchers at the ease with which she glided. The voice of Dirk rose above this shrill clamor like the bellow of a bull whale.

“God’s bones! Mark you how she schoons! Now here, lads, is a proper schooner, says I—” and so was the new type of vessel christened for all time.

Chapter IX

WITH sturdy legs braced and one hand on a taut back stay runner, Ruderic stood near the wheel and his tawny eyes glowed with exultation as they watched the behavior of his creation. Sitting on the rim of the cabin-house were O'Conor, the Lady Sheila and Horrocks, conversing on the one topic current aboard the vessel, the astonishing demonstration of her splendid qualities.

O'Conor turned and beckoned Ruderic who stepped across the sloping deck and joined the group.

Sheila shot him an intense look from her violet eyes, then shifted their gaze to the hazy distance.

"And what now do you think of your prodigy, mate?" asked O'Conor, gayly. "Do you find her more laggard than you had hoped?"

"I find her a little light, sir," Ruderic answered. "We could easily have taken a few more tons of brick for your plantation house, with no great loss of speed nor danger of washing our decks unduly."

"I would rather make it up in stores which we are to load at La Rochelle," O'Conor answered. "There is the wine and olive oil, the profits of which should go far toward paying for the ship. But better yet are the muskets and powder and guns which I have received word are being held for me on the Presque-Isle at Quiberon. Herein alone should lie enormous profit."

"If disposed of in such quarters where the demand is greatest," rumbled Horrocks.

O'Conor laughed. "Have no fear, old sea-wolf. Now that we are fairly under way, I do not mind confessing

to certain trade relations with the Red Rovers of the Sea. More than one lean-bellied wolf with raking masts has slipped up the river under nightfall to re-victual in hogs and corn and yams and such other stores as my plantation—what ails you, mate? Is aught amiss?" for his keen eye had caught a curious spasm on the face of Ruderic before it had been turned aloft.

"I find our vessel tender, sir," Ruderic answered, thickly. "I will be more easy in mind when she is laden to the mark of my calculations."

"Troth, but she strikes me to be stiff as a ramrod," said O'Conor. "The breeze is fresh, and mark you, her scuppers are not awash."

"She is not designed to heel like a cutter," grunted Horrocks, "nor yet to stand up straight as a Dutch drogher. And mark you, my lord, how the tell-tale at her truck streams straight aft, while yet she forereaches with no leeway that one can discover. She glances the wind from her canvas which is flattened from the weight of the booms to which it is tryced. Thus, unlike the free-footed sails of a lugger, she carries no dead weight of wind in the belly of her sails. She is like a kite and her centerboard, the cord made fast, by reason of which the kite darts heavenward."

"The proof of her amazing qualities may be yet to come," said O'Conor, "but when shortly ago Dirk heaved the log, I held the minute glass myself. I will wager that no vessel under sail has ever done as well when close-hauled on the wind."

"One need but get the feel of her," said Horrocks. "This broken chop treats her in the nature of a caress. There is no shock as she forges into a sea and no plunging nor burying, nor on the other hand the jarring pound I feared we might have reason to expect. That master shipwright, Phineas Pettman, softened the bluntness of bows in his vessels, but never did he carry this easement the length of the run."

Ruderic had been examining the top hamper of the vessel, which consisted only of topsails, bent to jacks- yards, the fore of which had been already lowered. He now ordered Dirk the bo'sun to get in likewise the main and to haul down the outer-jib. Then, turning to O'Conor, he asked in a voice in which still lingered some slight harshness of the tone of command, "Have you long owned this plantation, my lord?"

"For a matter of twenty-five years," O'Conor answered. "I came by it curiously enough and in a manner most tragic to its former owner, an Englishman, Capt. Sir John Wyndham, Baronet. For some time he had been suspected of dealings with the pirates, which in itself was no great crime, as many of the shore planters, whether through compulsion and fear of violence or in their own self-interest, had trade relations with the freebooters. But a small king's ship, *The Falcon*, poking into Bulls Bay, came unexpectedly upon a wherry of Sir John, my neighbor, charged with many articles of value not long since taken from a British ship which had been stripped and plundered by the pirates, her women ravished, and her crew and men passengers caused to walk the plank.

"This wherry was manned by slaves of Sir John and, a landing party being sent to arrest him, he made armed resistance. In the end he was wounded and overcome when, at his summary trial at the mast, three prisoners of the pirate crew did swear that he had aided in the cutting off of the merchantman, having for some years had relations with their captain, Redbeard, and that was his share of the booty.

"Without my knowledge, two of my own indentured men did likewise testify to Sir John having found recruits for Redbeard. Wherefore he was hanged in chains with sundry others of the freebooters, and his plantation confiscated by the Crown. It was already a rich property

which lay adjacent to my own grant, at this moment in the raw, and being offered for sale I found means to purchase it."

A slight listing of the vessel, as a flaw of the wind struck her full, seeming to catch Ruderic off his balance, he staggered and might have pitched against the lee-shrouds had not Master Horrocks flung out a great arm to steady him. The grip of his mighty hand closed for an instant like a vise on the elbow of the mate, who recovered himself and stood for a moment holding to the handrail on the rim of the deck house.

"And had this Wyndham a family?" he asked.

"Aye," O'Conor answered, "and therein lay the worst of the business. He had a young wife come out some five or six years before to wed him, and a little son had been born them. The mother disappeared soon after the execution of her husband and none knew whither she had gone. There was an indentured man, who was Sir John's steward, and he likewise disappeared. So that it was thought that he had led them to the Up Country where there was a colony of Scots."

"A tragic tale," said Horrocks, in his booming bass, "yet 'tis an ill wind which blows no good to any."

"Troth," said O'Conor, "I cannot deny but that the sad affair resulted in my profit. But what would you have? Some man was like to seize the opportunity. My holding was that adjoining and the great backwater of Cypress Swamp contained by an enormous dike which Sir John just completed was essential for the flooding of my rice fields when these should have been cleared."

"And have they since been cleared?" asked Horrocks.

"In part, but not yet to my satisfaction. For a higher pitch of development they should be cut in morsels by intersecting dikes, for their levels are unequal, so that there is too great a depth of standing water in certain

parts, when others are but barely covered, and as you may know the secret of successful rice growing is in the alternate flooding and exposure of the fields, from the moment when first one gets a stand of rice. Also, for the safety of the crop, I must build a great sea-dike where the plantation borders on the river mouth. Some years ago a hurricane, coming with a spring tide so thrust the water in that the lower third of the plantation was flooded with brine and thus lost nearly five years of production. It is for this that I require as many strong Congo blacks as I can afford to purchase and sustain, until such time as the enormous profits to accrue shall reimburse me. This work once accomplished, there should be no richer man in all the Western World than I."

There was complacency in his voice as he looked from Horrocks to Ruderick, though the face of the latter was turned away as if, absorbed in the sailing of the schooner, he had scarce given ear to his lordship's narrative.

"From this you may readily understand, Master Horrocks," continued O'Conor, "that it must be far more to my interest to serve myself of this amazing vessel for the running of blacks, than in such unlawful acts as that of my ill-fortuned neighbor, who came to a shameful end by such very doings, and by whose calamity my own fair fortune was founded."

Ruderick still clinging to the handrail was swaying drunkenly, and catching a glimpse of his white and haggard face, the Lady Sheila laughed.

"Oh la! Master Ruderick," said she, chidingly, "can it be that the dancing of your pretty ship has disturbed the stomach of her creator? Look you, gentlemen, I believe that our master's mate is stricken with *mal-de-mer*."

"Such often afflicts the best of sailors on freshly putting out to sea," rumbled Horrocks. "Take a turn on the deck, lad, and the vertigo will pass."

Ruderic appeared to pull himself together with a tremendous effort. "I may as well confess to a certain giddiness," said he. "It has happened before, and I take no shame of it since all of us must have our weaknesses."

But at this moment a distraction offered. Bo'sun Dirk came rolling aft and drew up before them with a tug of his forelock, and, glancing at his scarred and battered face, they discovered that Ruderic's sudden pallor was no greater than that of the sea-dog.

"Saints! bo'sun!" said O'Conor, "and does a shaggy sea-wolf such as you likewise feel the skittish motion of this schooner?"

"God's bones, sir! beggin' your honor's pardon," Dirk answered, "but she shall have to schoon as never vessel schooned before if you would not lose your bo'sun, late man-o'-warsman, Dirk Hopkins, seaman gunner."

Horrocks heaved himself to his feet and following the direction of Dirk's outstretched arm, saw through the wind-driven haze two points on the lee bow, the topsails of a vessel which seemed to be heading on a course to intercept their own. She was perhaps five miles away and dimly seen in the smoky sou'wester, but the experienced eye of Horrocks recognized her at a glance for what she was, a swift and able vessel in type resembling the French *chasse-mariée*, but twice the size of such and the swiftest craft to ply those waters.

"That will be the king's revenue-cutter *Bloodhound*, sir," said Dirk, "a patrolman of this section of the coast on the lookout for free traders. The lieutenant in command of her is young Sir Harry Brazenose who was watch officer of my part on the old frigate *Sea-Orse*, which, as your honor knows, I left without kissin' of him good-by. He wonders now who and wot the blazes be we, a skitterin' over the water like a flyin-fish, and 'e means to find out or know the reason w'y."

Chapter X

RUDERIC roused himself from what Lady Sheila had deemed to be his attack of *mal-de-mer*, and the color returned to his chalky face as he stared out across the white-flecked waves at the patrol boat.

"Dirk is right," said old Horrocks, a little anxiously. "It is the *Bloodhound*, and in splitting tacks she has the weather gauge on us. It would never do to let her lay us aboard and impound our good bo'sun, the best of all this brew of ours."

"As for impoundin', sir," growled Dirk, 'twill be the Black Arrow for me, not less. Now that it comes to this I will confess to 'avin' knifed a shipmate in a tavern brawl at Queenstown."

O'Conor frowned. "Take charge, mate," said he, "you know the qualities of your vessel better than do we. Plainly speaking I should say that she had us boxed. If we reach to north or south, she can run us to earth with a coast so nearly under our lee and she with the windward berth. If we hold our course we shall quickly be within range of her guns, and should we go about she can tack ship also and head us. Look you now, she signals us to heave to."

Ruderic's momentary weakness seemed swept away as if by magic. "Set your topsails!" said he to Dirk, "and run up your outer jib again. Look alive now! if you do not wish to wear that same black arrow."

Dirk thrust his bo'sun's pipe into his mouth, then bellowed forth his orders, which the hands already scenting danger leaped nimbly to obey.

"Do you man the windlass of the drop-keel, and heave it flush as we wear off, Uncle," said Ruderic. He leaped aft and took the wheel from the quartermaster whom he sent to bear a hand at the topsail halyards. *Hironnelle*, unlike the heavy craft of her time, payed off smartly as Ruderic put up his helm. "Ease fore and mainsheets," he called to the quartermaster.

All orders were smartly obeyed, and a moment later the schooner was tearing ahead with the wind abeam and flitting in the trough of the seas. As Ruderic well knew, this must be her point of fastest sailing with the steady weight of the wind striking her canvas flatly and no keel to hamper save the little which was properly of her hull and enough to hold her in a reaching breeze.

Aboard the cutter such maneuver was obvious confession of guilt, and there could have been no doubt in the minds of her people but that it was one destined to result in a capture. She eased her sheets and, with the fresh breeze on the quarter, gave herself to the pursuit.

But if *Hironnelle* had been previously flitting she now spread her wings in darting flight. Her bows seemed to rise as though she would take the air itself but there was no disturbance under them, none in the water abreast of her, and though she heeled a little more this did not slow her pace. Almost immediately the doubtfulness of the issue was dispelled. Dirk gave a great bellow of laughter and smote his thigh a blow which would have stunned the average man.

"Now what for a vessel is this, my marsters," he cried. "They Blood'ounders must be fair a rubbin' of their eyes. The smartest sailor on the coast pockets a strange craft and sees her slip out from under 'is lee with no more fuss nor feathers than a country girl a takin' of 'er heggs to market. Oh! but I love 'er like a sweet'eart," he cried, and in a sort of ecstasy of adoration he flung his arms

around the mainmast and bestowed upon it a hardy smack. "Whoso is shipmates with 'er 'as the freedom of the seas, say I. Mark you, sirs, 'ow the bosom of 'er snuggles into the clasp of the sea like a damsel—"

"Vast there, Dirk," growled Horrocks. "Send a hand aloft and rig an extra backstay from the mainmast head," for the willowy spar was springing in a threatening manner, this through the shrouds being not yet stretched nor any opportunity offered so far for the tautening of lanyards in the deadeyes.

But Ruderic had no fears. Light as she was, and with spars carefully selected of seasoned stuff, he felt that the vessel must be hove down before ever they would carry out of her.

The astonished *Bloodhound*, forced to admit that all hope of capture of the mysterious craft she chased was over, fired a shot from her bow chaser.

Those aboard the schooner could not see even where this struck. O'Conor walked aft and stared at Ruderic who was holding to the wheel. There was in the eyes of O'Conor a humid warmth which blinded them utterly to the stream of hatred which Ruderic, for all his effort, was unable to contain. So, in this strange encounter of emotions only possible between two members of the human species, conflicting passions of an admiration, raised almost to the pitch of a paternal love met and eddied in a vortex of such abomination and detestation as might have felled a sensitive like Lanty.

"Lad," said O'Conor, "I could take you in my arms and kiss you on both cheeks."

Ruderic's gaze went past him to the Lady Sheila who had slipped from her swinging perch and, beautifully poised to the swaying motion which was mostly rise and fall, was daintily picking her way along the quarter deck. She made a bright note of color in the fleecy woolens which

some shipwrecked Spanish sailor of the Great Armada, when strewn by the tempest on those shores, had generations before taught their people how to dye. A little tam of vivid red was set upon her black, glistening hair, caught up on one side by a swallow's wing. The birdlike roundness of her breast seemed snugly molded under a light guernsey of the same color, while a skirt of linen woven on the O'Conor estate was of snowy white, and snug about her hips, swirled in its full hem to reveal flashing glimpses of her ankles encased in silken stockings of French handicraft. Her little feet were shod all out of keeping with the vessel's deck, slippers of black satin with high red heels, which latter inconvenience seemed no more to hamper her equilibrium than might a wind-blown twig disturb that of bird. Looking over her father's shoulder, for her stature was above that of the average, her violet eyes examined Ruderic's set face with a puzzled look, less puzzled perhaps than thoughtfully inquiring, as the look of one who seeks to solve some baffling problem.

"Faith, your schooner is beyond our praise, Ruderic," said she, "and so are you. But why do you look so grim?"

O'Conor laughed. "True genius is never content, daughter," said he. "It must strive always for the unattainable. No doubt our dear lad is grievously disappointed that she cannot raise herself above the water's purchase and take wing and free air."

"No, Father, you read him wrongly," Sheila answered. "It is in his mind that he would rather be pursuer than pursued."

O'Conor smote his hands together. "Now are we never to rid him of this obsession to go a-pirating?" he asked, impatiently. "Bear in mind, lad, what I had finished telling you when interrupted by yon pot-bellied hound wallowing in our wake."

"I shall well consider it, my lord," Ruderic answered,

albeit between his teeth, which gesture might have seemed due to muscular strain from holding a kicking wheel.

"Is it not better to serve the ends of profitable production," pursued O'Conor, "than to cherish a dark desire to prey on others at their cost?"

"Far better, my lord."

"If you feel that you have wrongs to right," O'Conor continued, almost in pedantic tone, "then strike at your enemy through his profit in a larger way. Now I will tell you something, lad. There is great discontent in the United States of America because of impressment by Great Britain of American sailors on the high seas to serve on British ships, and unless I much mistake we shall soon find ourselves again at war with England."

"*Ourselves*, my lord?" asked Ruderic.

"Why yes," O'Conor answered. "I am a citizen of the United States, though still holding my estate in Ireland, and between ourselves, I rendered no insignificant service during the War of the Revolution as secret agent of Admiral John Paul Jones. And since you are by your own avowal a hater of the English, why should I not class ourselves together. When the hour strikes, Ruderic, those of us who have the resource and know the sea, may fit out privateers and prey upon British commerce with all due sanction of our government. This, you must admit, would be a far better venture than any scurvy pirating. It is my wish that you throw in your lot with mine, and you may go very far for there is very little that I would not grant you for the asking."

A fling of the sea caused him to reach out his arm to steady his balance, and his hand fell on Ruderic's shoulder. O'Conor failed to discern the ripple which ran through the straining body at the wheel and the lurid saffron glow in Ruderic's eyes. But Sheila caught it in some measure and her expression of puzzlement increased. O'Conor

recovered himself and moved away forward to rejoin Horrocks, who, standing by the weather shrouds, was watching Ruderic with covert disquietude. Ruderic beckoned to the quartermaster to relieve him at the wheel. This man was none other than Yellow Jack, but if there still existed in his breast a hatred of Ruderic, no evidence of such could be discovered.

Sheila tottered artfully upon her high heels when Ruderic was in all courtesy obliged to offer her his arm.

"Come, sit beside me on the house, Ruderic," murmured Sheila. "I wish to tell you what all must feel, that you are great in that part which is the greatest of any man, this same, his work."

"I am fair surfeited with over praise of my poor abilities, my lady," Ruderic answered.

"Then tell me, why you treat me with such scant kindness," and her eyes fastened intently upon his face, "and why do you sometimes look at my father as a bondsman might glare at a cruel and hated master? What is your quarrel with him . . . and with me?"

Perhaps, knowing his intolerance and haughty pride, she couched her simile in these terms on the chance of vexing Ruderic into some betrayal of what so puzzled her. But if this were so she overshot the butts, for Ruderic, indifferent of wit and with no skill nor practice in fencing of this sort, was still no hotheaded fool who, angered at a taunt, may leave his guard uncovered. Moreover he was beginning to feel the reaction from the suffocating fury of rage and hatred aroused by O'Conor's story of how he had come by his plantation, and it was borne in upon him that twice he had barely saved himself from an outburst fatal to his plan if not to his arch enemy.

So now, at Sheila's barbed question, he felt less anger than the need of caution and therefore answered bitterly: "I build my lord O'Conor an uncommon ship for a bold

venture and he can find no better use for her than as a filthy ferrier of black slaves."

Sheila shook her head. "That will not do, Ruderic," said she. "Therein might be sufficient cause for disappointment and vexation, but not for the unfriendliness which you make scant effort to conceal. There must be a better reason, and I am strongly of opinion that I know it."

Ruderic must have whitened, for Sheila, closely scrutinizing his face, gave a low, triumphant laugh with a rising inflection on its final notes, then asked, mockingly: "And is your *mal-de-mer* returning, now that the excitement of the chase is over?"

"I have already said that I am no very stanch sailor on first putting out to sea," Ruderic answered, "and the quick, buoyant motion of this vessel is not that to which I am accustomed."

"Nonsense, sir mate," said Sheila. "For your part the disturbance is of the brain and not the stomach. Shall I tell you wherein the trouble lies?"

"As you wish," Ruderic muttered.

"And if my hazard proves true, then will you admit the charge?"

"I am not here to confess," said Ruderic, coldly, "but to sail the schooner."

"Now Ruderic," Sheila pleaded, "why will you be so stubborn? Can you not see that you have my sympathy, and that I wish to stand your friend? Why should it irk me that you love this maid, and how can I blame you that you hate my father for his ill use of May and Master Benton?"

Ruderic's head bobbed up in his amazement, then he quickly turned away his face that Sheila might not see it written there. She gave a little laugh of triumph in which was not much mirth.

"*Touché, Ruderic, n'est ce pas?*" She queried in the

French with which both were familiar. "I was stupid not to have guessed the secret long ago. But is it not the truth?"

She leaned forward to peer into his face, her own a little pale and her eyes dark as indigo. Ruderic, to save her trouble, turned his head and envisaged her defiantly. Though not over quick for such a duelling of wits he was still able to perceive with no delay the advantages of this blind to whatever emotions he might thoughtlessly betray.

"I shall neither admit nor deny your accusation, my lady," he answered, doggedly.

Sheila sighed. "Oh dear, there is no need," said she.

"And when did you arrive at this conclusion," Ruderic asked. "And how?"

"But a moment or two ago, and by no great exercise of logic. Dear Saints, but I might have guessed the night we talked together in the rose gardens. For at the slightest hint that his lordship's favor and high regard of you might find expression in a way paternal you begin to seeth and glower and to pour from your eyes such yellow baleful gleams as might dart from the orbs of an osprey or kestrel thrust into the cage with some tame female of its kind. Your heart is set on this soft and tender girl with her baby face so pink and white and golden lovelocks and great blue eyes, and I cannot say that I blame you for your choice, for she is sweetly pretty and alluring."

"There is indeed no sweeter lass in all of Ireland than May Benton," muttered Ruderic.

"Though not Irish herself, except upon her mother's side," said Sheila. "I learned before we sailed that her father is of the race you hate, an Englishman, in spite of which he was the only cherished friend of Master Horrocks and yourself. Wherefore I find it quite in accord with human nature that you should hate my father for his intolerance of the man."

"But why this persecution of him?" Ruderic asked. "My lord has caused Master Benton to be expelled from his estate, so that he now purposes to sell his fishing boats and may in all likelihood return to his former calling of Master Mariner."

"My father has reason to hate the English even more than do you, yourself," said Sheila. "He has also reason to suppose that this man spied upon him and made report of his comings and goings and other movements. There is no doubt in our minds but that it was through his information that the *Bloodhound* was stationed here to intercept us, standing back and forth in the offing in no fear but that she could easily lay us aboard, possibly to confiscate this ship as one built and destined for free trading."

Ruderic shook his head. "Master Benton would have played me no such scurvy trick," said he, "especially after my act in defense of his daughter."

Sheila raised her prettily rounded shoulders, then her eyes kindled, and the rich color flooded her white face just as a sudden crimson ray of the late autumn sun had pierced suddenly a rift of cloud in the lee set to the northward and was laying a crimson wash on the new and snowy sails of the schooner.

"Yours was the act of a true man, Ruderic," Sheila murmured, "whatever the motive for it."

"No man could have done less and still called himself a man," said Ruderic, "but no praise is due me for the final outcome of it. I acted first in defense of the maid and then quickly for my own. Had I paused to parley or remonstrate, I would not be here to-day. But this much I may say in all truth, that I would have done the same for any other girl or woman in such straits."

"I believe you, Ruderic," said Sheila, softly, "and the result of it was good, for the world is rid of a very wicked villain, and such now is the respect and fear in which the

others hold you that there can be no more question of prompt obedience which, as my father says, is the first requisite of safety for those who challenge the dangers of the sea. Dearie me!" she sighed again, "and were you very grieved at parting with your sweetheart, Ruderic?"

Again Ruderic turned away his head, and this time it was to hide a smile, for May Benton, like many girls of such luscious sort, had seemed to ripen in a single summer, and Ruderic, intent upon his occupation, had never thought of her as other than a child. Yet now she served well as a mask behind which he might hide the exposition of his hatred for O'Conor, and it amused him to think that Sheila, that subtle girl, should herself have furnished him with such a screen.

She sighed again. "I suppose now that every mile of separation will make you the more bitter, Ruderic, but it is not fair that you should make me also the object of your spleen."

"I shall try not to do so, my lady," Ruderic answered, "but I pray you to make no mention of this matter to your father. I would not have him know even that I cherish the least ill humor toward him."

"No fear, Ruderic," Sheila answered, "he does not guess it yet, so what need of informing him? I can keep a secret, *mon cher*. And," she swayed gently toward him to whisper in his ear, so that her breath fanned his cheek and his pulse responded to the closeness of her, "if, some night when the breeze is sighing low and the air balmy and sweet, you feel the hunger for your May to famish you, then may you kiss me in her stead and I shall waft the kiss to her across the leagues of ocean."

She sprang up quickly and made her way forward, swinging lithely from the waist in the fashion of the folk of the sea, while Ruderic's gaze followed her with brooding eyes. He was watching as, with one hand clinging to the

shrouds, she leaned over to observe the wash of the water when there came up through an open skylight at his feet the childish lilting of Lanty's voice in one of the little chanteys with which at times his whimsy sought expression.

“Oh the waves may roll and the winds may blow,
Heave ho, far over the sea.
'Tis more than the sails make the vessel go,
Heave ho and a whisper for thee.
A word in thine ear, my mariner brave,
Heave ho, let her go through the water.
'Tis Love that drives her through the wave,
'Tis Life and Love and the marster's daughter—”

Chapter XI

THEY called at Lorient, and, there being a peace of sorts patched up between the French and English (though this might not have mattered much as O'Conor possessed strong friends and influence among the former who knew him for the anglophobe he was), they took aboard their cargo of wine and stores and sundry articles of trade and shipped their guns, these latter cast in the latest model of the time, stern and bow chasers warranted to carry far and true from their length and the new-fashioned device of rifling, which, though invented in a previous century, had not for some reason been in vogue, and for their broadsides four bronze culverins which might serve for grape or solid shot.

Then off to sea again on a long voyage which was, however, broken at one of the western islands for stores and water, and again at the Bermudas, which lay upon their course. These were idle days for all, the weather being for the most part fine and the sea upon its good behavior. Ruderic strove constantly to perfect himself as much as possible in the science of navigation in which he was already more skillful than the average shipmaster, and in which both O'Conor and Horrocks excelled. Having considerable knowledge of astronomy and a head for mathematics, Ruderic was able to evolve a new and shorter method of working out his calculations from the quadrant, and discovered how to determine the ship's position from observation on fixed stars hitherto unused by mariners, the stellar almanac being as yet incomplete.

With three such officers as were in command, the vessel's discipline could not be other than absolute. Bo'sun Dirk, like most men of strong, crass animal nature, once having given Ruderic his fealty was like a bulldog in his adoring devotion. No need had Ruderic so much as to raise his voice, Dirk taking such details off his hands. Yellow Jack, the most recalcitrant of the dozen which comprised the crew, he stretched one day senseless on the deck for merely daring to grumble at the expediency of Ruderic's order.

"W'o are you, blarsted 'ound with a jaundiced hide, to lift your pizened voice in question of 'is orders," growled Dirk, when the grumbler had regained ability to hear his admonitions. "Lucky for you 'e didn't raise 'and to you, say I. A lad that stretches Simon Peter with a lump of flint and slits his gullet across his knee with Simon's own knife is an ill choice for the 'anding of back slack. Simon Peter, mind ye, was feared in every port o' the Spanish Main, and with good reason. I have seen 'im curse Redbeard to 'is flamin' whisker and on his own bloody quarter-deck. Nay, mateys all, grumble ye mayn't, but go ye must is 'igh-word 'ere. . . ."

Aside from this there was no episode of violence. And thus in time developed a curious situation which the student of humans, their passions and emotions, may explain as best he can. For this vessel, into the purpose and building and future plans for which were wrought the very darkest and most sinister intentions, now skimmed those peaceful seas in an atmosphere of good accord which it is doubtful hallowed the passage of any ship then under way. She had been conceived of mortal vengeance, her members hewn and sawn and fitted and treenailed in blows and hate and curses, so that it would seem as though the most poisonous venom of which the human breast is capable must have been worked into the

very warp and woof of her, and that from stem to stern-post and truck to gudgeon her very frames and strakes and decks and bulkhead plankings should be saturated with the slime of hate.

Her very mission was of like evil. Destined by her owner for the short-run carrying of wretched slaves, there were others who had darker plans for her.

And now she swam in the pleasant atmosphere of peace. She was, in fact, a "happy ship," if happiness can dwell with hatred. But the hatred while there was held in abeyance, bottled like a fire in the hold and lacking the elements for combustion. O'Conor, whatever his past crimes and present faults, proved himself a generous host and master, was liberal in his dispensation of good fare and wine, and no hard taskmaster in the matter of work, which, as rig and gear were new and the weather genial could scarce be found aboard a ship so overmanned for the actual working thereof. Also, his conversations were agreeable, and, like his daughter, he was a musician of no small talent and training, his instrument the violin and hers the harp. So that the hours of calm held no fretting, but were fraught with melody to which the savage crew listened englamored.

And there was Lanty, the Natural, who had come to be regarded by the men as a sort of kindly Pook or Bogart or Lob or other fairy, and may have been. As if charging himself to hold tedium at bay and keep the restless minds from mischief his songs and mimicries and harmless pranks were unabating. Perhaps he was something between pet and pest, like an ape or parrot, while at the same time was he feared. It had been the cruel sport of Simon Peter to bait Lanty for the brutal amusement of his mates. He would scare the poor sensitive into convulsions with his fearsome oaths and blasphemies, nor did he spare his hand from physical abuse, and had once thrown a strop

about his ankle and catching the bight in the block-hook of a jig, run the poor creature dangling head downward to the topmost truck. And behold what had befallen Simon Peter, that man of terrible repute!

Other faculties of Lanty aroused their superstitious awe. He could call up to him the wild sea-mews and feed them from his hand. He could be blindfolded and spun about in a breathless calm, then point at will to any quarter of the compass, so that, as Dirk remarked, the instrument was as superfluous for such as he as for a seal or gull. Also, in such a calm, he could announce the coming of the breeze a good half hour before the first dark line of it etched the horizon, and tell from what quarter it would spring. But let him be "gallied" or frightened or in any way distressed and these rare gifts were paralyzed.

So they sailed on in peace. But there was one member of the ship's company who did not thrive on this silken tranquility. The sustained role of guide, counselor and friend began to work its ravages on the nerves of Master Horrocks. His duties in open sea were practically nil, for his engagement with O'Conor was that of pilot in the waters of the West Indies, which were sown with islands large and small, and cays and shoals and coral reefs. Here, off soundings, he had naught to do but listen to the erudite converse of O'Conor, himself a traveled and a polished man, if not of Horrocks's own class in scholarly attainments. And Sheila, surprised to find such gentle traits in the master shipwright as well as such a profundity of learning both practical and abstract, appeared to have swung to the opposite opinion of him, and would listen absorbed for so long as he saw fit to give her benefit of his informations.

For Master Horrocks was one of those curious and contradictory minds which, of even balance in all other ways, yet lacks proportion in its findings of good and bad.

His premise, or proposition, was absolute denial in the existence of a just God, but that the world and her peoples were writhing under the dominion of evil. This hate, according to his inverted sophistry, was only to be combated in kind, and that he who would not be destroyed must first destroy. But there was this saving grace to his philosophy, that one should not destroy until threatened by destruction, or where such effort had been made and failed in its completion. Unthreatened by molestation, Horrocks argued for living without molesting his neighbor; even aiding him was a human indulgence permissible. But self-protection by counter-offensive was the anchor of his faith, and its sheet anchor the obligation for revenge when wrong was done.

So now, obsessed by this conviction and rearing the son of his beloved master in such stern belief, Horrocks's nature, innately kind, suffered from the strain of the false relationship with those whom he purposed to destroy. Though he and Ruderic were served a separate mess, the constant social intercourse began to break down the resistance of the older man. His giant frame showed inroads of emaciation. His cavernous eyes retreated deeper into their grottos to glow in the darkness of them with more brightness in their embers, while his booming voice was sunk in pitch, as the voice of the miner proceeding from the bottom of the shaft.

Sheila, the acutest mind aboard (and also in justice the least preoccupied), was the first to become aware of these symptoms, and they gave her deep concern, for she had conceived almost an affection for this scholar of mistaken soul. One day when they were sitting together in the shade of a quarter awning rigged enduring a calm she taxed him gently with the failing of his physical condition.

"I fear, Master Horrocks," said she, "that you are suffering from the tedium of this interminable voyage."

Horrocks roused himself from the reverie into which he seemed to fall at times. "At first the heat oppresses me, my lady," said he. "The blood of the northerner is too rich a mixture for the tropic. But Dame Nature soon establishes an equilibrium by depletion through the pores of the skin, when the newcomer grows acclimated."

"But your discomfort wears less the aspect of physical ill than a depression of the mind," said Sheila, "I would that I might cheer you."

A shadow darkened Horrocks's face at the sweetness of her voice and kind intention.

"The body and the mind are so closely allied in most of us, my lady," said he, "that the indisposition of the former reacts upon the latter. A torpid liver might cause a crime. This was understood by the ancient Greeks who named a gloomy person 'hypochondriac,' which translated means 'under the ribs,' and has reference to the heavy liver sagging there. Nevertheless," he added with a sudden access of impatience, "I wish the wind would blow. I care not from what quarter nor how great the force if only it would blow. There is naught to soothe the impatience of man like the vaster impatience of the elements."

"And would you have no fear for the safety of this light cockle-shell of ours in a West Indian hurricane?" asked Sheila.

"No more than I would fear for the safety of a gull riding out the tempest. Light though she be of build, Ruderic has skilfully figured the strains and stresses, so that that part of her which bears the brunt of these is even heavier than in the case of most vessels, while an economy of weight occurs where weight is not required."

Sheila leaned back and, clasping one knee in her hands, looked at Horrocks with a frank directness of gaze.

"The other day," said she, "I guessed a riddle which had sorely perplexed me. This was a simple problem which I should have solved from the beginning had I not been stupid."

Master Horrocks, who had been informed by Ruderick of Sheila's wrong conclusion, feigned an interest in her words.

"No problem should be difficult if one attacks it with analytic mind," said he. "And what was it that even for a brief space baffled one of your acumen?"

"That of Ruderick's thinly veiled misliking for my father and myself," said she. "I should have perceived long since that it was due to his love for that pretty maid, May Benton, and my father's stern usage of her. Also this explains in some measure his wish to go a-pirating, that he may gain sudden fortune with which to establish himself in a manner befitting his station, which I am convinced is not the humble one you would have us to believe. But here is only a half of the question answered."

"And the other half?" asked Horrocks.

"Ah, Master Horrocks, that is far more difficult to solve. Ruderick is young and hot of head and heart, and like all in whose brains weave many inventions under the sway of feverish imaginings. Having no religion to control him, he is like a ship without a rudder and buffeted about by the winds of impulse. But you, Master Horrocks, are a man of ripe years and scholarly attainments and kindly heart though you would have us to think otherwise. Why, therefore, do you desire to entrain my father in cruel and lawless ventures, which entail the loss and suffering of others. He has no need nor inclination for profits wrongfully obtained, and no more have you. Why then are you the ill adviser of such acts of scathe?"

She tilted back her head and, looking down the slant of her cheeks under long, fringed lashes, sought to prove

the cavernous depths of Horrocks's dull, glowing eyes. His great shoulders moved uneasily.

"Your father asks repeatedly the same question," said he, "and I can but give you the same answer which I have given him. My philosophy instructs me that the strong man should not permit his wrongs to go unredressed. I have suffered at the hands of an humanity which has its source in evil. Many years ago, I was branded as a criminal in punishment of a wrong doing which was not mine. I was deported as a bondsman under lifelong indenture, and while working out this unjust sentence an even greater wrong caused me to become a pirate. Thus, society having made of me an outlaw, an outlaw I would remain until such time as I feel the score to be paid in full."

"But does not your wise reasoning tell you that such a course is far from one of logic," Sheila asked. "Is it fair that others who have had no part in your misfortunes should pay the price of them?"

"I regard it in a broader sense," said Horrocks. "Let us suppose that a farmer's flock had suffered the depredations of a wolf. Would he not then have reason to make war on all wolves?"

"Wolves are rapacious beasts of prey," said Sheila.

"And so if truth be told are most men," said Horrocks. "There may be wolves who do not prey upon the flocks through fear or finding safer hunting elsewhere. Still are they wolves, and still are men, men. Now in pursuit of our argument, let us take as example he who is nearest and dearest to you, which is your father. Doubtless you believe him, and rightly from your viewpoint, to be an honest and a kindly man," and his slumberous eyes challenged her with subtle invitation, and noted the angry glow which began to suffuse her clear skin.

"And would you deny such opinion?" Sheila demanded.

"In debate," said Horrocks, gently, "one awaits the final proving of the proposition, the *quod erat demonstrandum*."

"If he is such, then by what justification may he purchase black slaves, wrongfully ravished from their homes, and convey them to his plantation, there to labor under the lash in the building of dikes and redeeming of lands for his enrichment at their cost."

"But they are blacks," protested Sheila.

"Black as to their skins, yet who may say that the souls of many are not whiter than those of their masters. They are human like ourselves, for they have speech and reason and affection when kindly entreated, and have often demonstrated sublime and unselfish devotion which you must admit."

"So have dogs," said Sheila.

"Dogs have from time immemorial been brute vassals and companions of man and dependent on his bounties. These slaves have not, any more than have you or I. They have been wrested by bloody force from their homes and wives and children. Why, then, if your father is countenanced in serving himself of these humans who have done him no wrong, individually or as a race, am I not countenanced in serving myself of a humanity which has done me mortal wrong?"

Sheila looked perplexed. "Then you would argue that my father does wrong in availing himself of such slave labor?" she asked.

Horrocks shook his head. "I have not said that. I do but claim that my own course is more justified than his. I have suffered injustice from humanity and I seek the payment of a debt."

Sheila leaned forward and her violet eyes flashed. "Then seek it at the hands of those who did the wrong," she cried, in her low, throaty voice. "Make them pay if

you will and to the uttermost farthing. Pursue the scriptural vengeance, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'"

Horrocks nodded as though in approval of her finding, and at some peculiar quality in the glow of his sunken eyes and the suspicion of a sardonic smile, which rested for a moment on the concise, smooth-shaven lips, a little shudder rippled through her.

"You have said it, my lady," murmured Horrocks.

"Woe to the objects of your vengeance," murmured Sheila, from whose face the color had fled.

"Aye, woe to them," rumbled from the cavernous chest of the master shipwright.

Chapter XII

IN the early dawn of a December morning, *Hirondelle* drifted up the broad mouth of the estuary with the sluggish current of the incoming tide.

The sun had not yet risen, but the marshes were already awake, and from all about the wild fowl were sounding their *reveille* and mustering their winged cohorts for the maneuvers of the coming day. Over against the dull blue green of the cypress swamp, on the larboard hand, a file of pelican were proceeding in military formation to their station on the sand-bar at the estuary's mouth. Golden and black-breasted plover were shrilling their fifes to the booming drum of bittern on picket duty in the shallows, the kildee whistling from the marshes, and from the high air came the clarion trumpeting of swan in southern migration outward bound to their rendezvous on the Bahama Bank.

Then a flying squadron of flamingoes drifted across the zenith, and the upward slanting rays of the still hidden sun pricked out their roseate plumage in points of floating flame. Like incandescent embers they pierced even the crimson edges of the cirrus clouds above them until quenched in the absorbing blue of distance.

And the still waters were no less alive. Under the schooner's bows rose a cumbrous manatee, stared at the impending mass with blank and stupid face, then forged its way to mid-channel under long, flat undulations. To starboard the silver sheen was frosted suddenly by schooling mullet, and into these rushed a great tarpon, which, for the bewilderment of its prey, propelled its flashing

bulk for twice its length in air and, falling flatwise, so threw the school into disorder from this concussion that foraging became a simple matter. And on the shelving sand-banks at either hand of the lagoon, sinister forms resembling the scaly trunks of trees awaited with saurian patience the rays which should stir and quicken slow pulses dependent for their rhythm on the temperature of their enveloping medium.

Aboard *Hirondelle* was to be found the subdued tension of expectation common to those who come in from the sea at the end of a long and tedious voyage. The passage, though good, had been delayed by light and baffling winds such as would have left the average vessel of the time still wallowing about in broad mid-ocean. And now, as the sweet yet miasmatic odors wafted from the shores in a breeze that filled only the more lofty topsails, there pervaded all a sort of feverish impatience to set foot to earth, and stretch upon the ground and taste fresh fodder and revel in a freedom of space so long denied by the narrow confines of the vessel.

All hands were on deck, and gazing with satisfaction upon a prospect uninviting, yet not without its notes of desolate beauty. There was a flush in the lean cheeks of old Horrocks as his vision absorbed environs fraught with so much of tragic circumstance, first bitter in his bondage, then sweet in associations with a loved and kindly domestic unit, then blackly bitter again at the foul disruption of such relations.

Sitting with Ruderic on the rail amidships, and out of earshot of the others, he indicated the scenes of early incidents.

"On yonder point of solid ground there once stood a blockhouse which was burned by the buccaneers," said he. "You may still perceive some fragments of the foundations. It was then decided that this site was too

exposed for the establishment of a colony. That was a score of years before your father's coming here to break ground for his plantation, which he purchased under the grant to Sir Robert Heath by King Charles. But your father was a bold man and had the vision to see the possibilities of great industry in this place." His voice grew husky. "Never have I known his like for wisdom and sweetness and force of character. When first as a bondsman, devouring my soul in bitterness, I looked into his eyes, I said to myself 'Here be perhaps a master, but likewise an elder brother,' and so he proved."

"And my mother," asked Ruderic, eagerly.

"If I possessed belief in angels, I should say that your mother was such, but I think of her rather as of some goddess of mythology, or a composite of the best of them. She was made of honey and flame, and fruit and flowers, with at times the soft and tender beauty of Aphrodite, and at others the chaste vigor and eagerness of Artemis. On her arrival she looked into my soul with those clear, golden eyes of hers which you inherit, and finding it clean she gave me forthwith full measure of her friendship and of her faith. She would have occupied herself in my restitution but I said, 'to what end, my lady. I have been broken and you have mended me between you. I would remain in such pleasant bondage throughout my life and after.' So you may see, lad, that my indenture did not weigh heavily upon me, nor was it indeed considered here as such. Now yonder—" he leaned forward and suddenly his voice choked and failed him, while, at the ashen pallor which overspread his face, Ruderic felt the need to pass an arm behind his shoulders and grip the rigging.

But the seizure of emotion lasted only for an instant. "Yonder," said Horrocks, quietly, "where you see the sudden termination of the piney woods, marks the first clearing made by O'Conor, and his fields stretch on along

the bank for nearly a mile before abutting on the boundaries of what, by rights, is yours. As you may observe, the land is dangerously low, and he ran always the risk that a freakish high tide might flood the rice fields with brackish water, which indeed happened as he has told us. It was just off that point of cypress above there that Redbeard brought his brigantine to anchor when O'Conor, having corrupted those two hellhounds, like myself indentured to your father, made dupes of them.

"He having privily sent word to the British sloop-of-war *Falcon*, then at Charleston, that Redbeard had gone up the river, persuaded these two fools to slip down by night in your father's wherry and lug this booty aboard her. Taken thus red-handed, it needed but a few lying witnesses to convict your father of a partnership with the pirates, particularly with that black mark against him of having previously been taken on a pirate vessel of which you know."

Ruderic pondered for a moment. "O'Conor is a cheap scoundrel," said he, "and one of blunted instincts not to recognize in you an enemy."

Horrocks shrugged. "As for that," said he, "barring his commercial talents, the man has no great natural faculties of any sort that I am able to discover. It would take far keener senses than he can boast to recall in old Horrocks, master craftsman, albeit *ci-devant* scholar, the individual I was as bondsman of your father, a student, lean and hungry-eyed, fresh from my researches in the School of Arts at Heidelberg, where I had studied philosophy, and thence returned to set England afame with my theses. A student brawl, Sir Harry Townsend wallowing in his gore and here was I, outward bound, a serf. He saw me here on the plantation, a hectic youth, blond of beard, stooping of shoulder, sullen to strangers and not yet recovered from my shame, averse to looking men

squarely in the eye. He had planned, no doubt, that I be gilled in the net with the others, but I escaped and joined the buccaneers, which no doubt saved my life in more ways than one, as the briny air of open sea dissolved and washed away a consumption which had fastened on my lungs through the humid heat of this Low Country."

"And my mother," muttered Ruderic, not questioningly, but as one who reflects.

"Your mother," said Horrocks, in his amorphous tones, "was supposed to have joined a party starting for the Up Country, where she had kinsfolk at Kenneth's Hundred. This was not true. I found her, broken and distraught, in the abandoned plantation house. She refused to let me lead her away, saying that life had ceased for her with the death of your father. Then she confided you to my care, a sturdy little lad of four, and I sent you forthwith to my kinsfolk in Glasgow in the charge of the Master Mariner of the *Golden Prospect*, a good friend. Your mother half crazed, haunted the plantation until O'Conor came."

"And then," Ruderic breathed.

Horrocks turned to him a bleak face, set like a mask of clay except for the smoldering fire which seemed to blaze up suddenly in the sunken orbits.

"Her pure soul was beyond his reach—but her body he took for his desire."

Chapter XIII

TO Ruderic the place was like the memory of an elusive dream. Certain features of it had etched themselves upon his baby mind so deeply that their traceries still lingered. These were unhappy ones, the fine white cicatrices of soul wounds, suffered in infancy, still to reveal themselves in the adult as records of poignant sorrow.

He remembered, in a general way, the park of pretty little live oaks set out in the cleared space before the big drab house, partly of flat imported bricks until the supply of these ran out, partly of whip-sawed pine slabs with its great chimneys of lath and clay. Familiar also were the broad rice fields with their containing dikes, though he recalled these not dry as at the present, but flashing like mirrors all swept with the freshest and most delicate of greenish color at the first stance of the young rice. And he had not forgot how the yellow blood of the sluggish river brimmed up to the banks in bland and greasy eddies, nor the stout jetty from which he used to fling sticks into the water and watch them drift away. It was tide water, though of slight rise and fall, two feet and odd at ordinary seasons, though a hurricane might force the water up to flood the "park," as one day it was destined to become, with its sapling live oaks to attain a girth that four men joining hands could not encircle.

Yet all of these memories rent Ruderic's heart, partly because of the lifelong schooling to dwell upon his wrongs and partly because he could actually remember the atmosphere of frantic grief which had colored his last

weeks at the plantation and his mother's weepings and in glimpses of the flight down the river in a dugout canoe propelled by Horrocks.

But Ruderic was spared such doleful reminiscence for any great length of time as O'Conor, riding into Port Royal, fell upon an acquaintance just up from New Orleans, from whom he had news which threw him in a fever of impatience to be off to sea again. Barataria was his objective. This port was for the moment a slave mart, and barracoons had been constructed and prime Congo bucks could be purchased for a quarter what they fetched in Carolina. There was, of course, the risk of such merchandise being seized and confiscated by some naval patrol ship, since Congress, by a recent act, had voted that the traffic be abolished as inhuman, unjust, and displeasing in God's sight.

O'Conor rightly argued that the price of slaves must henceforth rise steadily, as the result of this act and the growth of the states, and that in its relation with the market price of corn and cotton, sugar, tobacco and, above all, rice, might reach a figure that would be prohibitive. His shrewd eye had been quick to perceive the enormous profits to be derived from his estate by the building of a tidewater levee, the control of many square miles of backwater, the clearing of fresh fields and the means of regulating their flooding by subdividing dikes and slews to be fed from a main canal properly equipped with trunks.

He felt that no time was to be lost, that he had wasted some years of development through lack of capital to carry on the work, and frequent absences, when the plantation had been farmed on shares by his steward, a man of shrewdness and capacity. The latter of these years he had spent principally in France, where Sheila was under instruction in a convent school which enjoyed the patronage of the nobility.

O'Conor was a sort of avatar of the early Phœnician merchant adventurers, shrewd traders whose rapacity might, if given favorable opportunity, turn to piracy or pillage, and who were yet free-handed in the dispensing of their gold, whether ill or honestly got. There was to him much of the trader of wide comprehension and promoter of prospects which his farsighted acumen told him must reap rich harvest.

So that now, with certain accumulated profits to his credit and a record harvest for that year in his granaries and awaiting shipment, he could not rest until off to buy and fetch a cargo of blacks. Fifty lusty negroes would mean an increase of thousands of pounds in the revenue of his plantation. The swift schooner could defy all pursuit. Awaiting a favorable opportunity to slip out to sea, she could show a clean pair of heels to any vessel of her time and in a week's voyage land her precious living cargo at the plantation. Several voyages might be necessary; O'Conor would be particular in his selection, and might even be forced to certain negotiations in the making of loans to carry out his plans. Besides this, the slave trade from Africa was now in a precarious state. Slavers were being seized and sunk before ever they got clear of the West Coast, while many suffered heavy losses in their passage through sickness breaking out in the festering holds, where the blacks were perforce confined in foul weather, and from the disasters of the sea. O'Conor's informant had told him gruesome tales of whole consignments of shackled blacks being cast overboard, when capture became imminent, that the actual evidence of the vessel's occupation might be destroyed. The ferocious sharks, which followed these filthy vessels in swarms, took ready charge of this office, were in a way of speaking the zealous allies of the slaver.

O'Conor returned to the plantation in a fever of im-

patience and gave order to Horrocks and Ruderic that *Hirondelle*, scarcely rested from her long voyage, be got immediately ready for sea. Her casks were cleaned and filled with the clear brown tamarak water, which does not foul no matter how great the heat or long the voyage.

A victualing of yams and rice for paddy was loaded aboard. A blacksmith and his assistants were set to work at the forging of chains and shackles for their wretched fellow victims. Ringbolts were let into deck and hold, and planking and rice straw was compressed and snugly bailed for the litter. An abundance of Peruvian bark was also stored for the dosing of fever victims, and a quantity of paregoric for the treatment of the flux.

Horrocks and Ruderic carried out their part of the preparations with grim faces. It struck hard at both their pride and the affection which they bore for their creation to see her turned to such a dirty use.

"It is but a means toward our end, lad," growled Horrocks. "One unlawful act ever leads toward another. These freebooting knaves of ours are far from content with so dingy a venture, and the opportunity may offer to coerce O'Conor into some more overt act against the enforcement of arbitrary laws passed by those having nothing to lose by them."

So *Hirondelle* sailed and fetched back her cargo of blacks in a quick and prosperous voyage. O'Conor, though liking the business no better than the others, was yet delighted at his success. He had established certain relations as a customer, and shortly went again, and yet again. Then, seeing much profit therein, and finding himself in need of funds to carry on these operations, he made selection of the less desirable of his merchandise and ran to certain West Indian ports where he disposed of them at enormous percentage of profit. Several times the schooner was chased by patrolling vessels engaged in the cleaning

up of buccaneers, which gentry were now diminishing in numbers, but still lurked in the cays and had their rendezvous in and about the Bahamas.

But at the first sighting of a suspicious sail the swift schooner quickly dropped it over the horizon. Off the tip of Florida a lifting fog one morning revealed a Yankee sloop of war some few miles away, but Horrocks ran in through the shallow waters of the scattered cays where the pursuing ship dared not follow. O'Conor peddled off his wares here and there a good deal as an itinerant horse-breeder might take the road with a string of his cattle and dispose of them along the route. And the profits of such trading were enormous.

Chapter XIV

NOW all this time the Lady Sheila stayed at the plantation and, accustomed as she was to rotate on a wider orbit, grew daily more discontent thereat.

She suffered no great lack of society, for the rumor of her charm and beauty spread quickly throughout the region, and there was never the lapse of many days in which the mount of some young blade was not led to the stables by a black hostler. There were older ones as well who found pretext to pass that way, and men of note in the colony, even to its governor, and ladies of neighboring plantations near Charlestown or Port Royal came in their chaises to pay her a visit or to carry her away with them for some ball or other merrymaking.

But Sheila's heart was off aboard the schooner, with her father and perhaps one other, and though not without her coquetties she found small pleasure in her colonial cavaliers, whether young or old. The occupation of O'Conor was more than suspected, and winked at while secretly approved, for men's sympathies lie for the most part in their purses and future interests, and the colony, for its very existence and promise of prosperity, was as utterly dependent on the black slave as might be the living of the European farmer on his cattle. To the southern planter the ban on slavery was equivalent to what might have been the ban on sheep and horses and other cattle to the Yorkshireman, so that one engaged at his risk in the further supply of such commodity was in the nature of a benefactor. Admittedly a nasty businesss personally to perform yet was it an obligatory one if the colonies were to thrive.

But Sheila hated it, and sickened at the stench wafted from the clean-winged *Hirondelle* which, stealing up the river under cover of the night, came alongside the jetty to discharge her black freight. A score of slaves was set to work at once to flush and scour her inside, whereat Sheila, of more sensitive nostrils than the others, from lack of having voyaged aboard the vessel, would rise in a rage and order her towed a mile farther up and moored off in the stream.

She voiced her bitterness to Ruderic one evening as they sat upon the broad veranda and listened to the whippoorwills and other nocturnal noises of the place.

"I wonder you can endure this occupation, or to see your lovely vessel engaged in such, or engage in it yourself," she said, in her low, throaty voice.

Ruderic shrugged. "Frankly, there could be nothing so little to my liking," said he, "but I have made engagement with your father and am liberally paid for such service."

"And is pay everything?" she cried, "even though it be to put by a little fortune which may enable you later to carry out your intention in regard to Mistress May?"

"It keeps me constantly at sea," said Ruderic, "and for me the sea is of herself an absorbing mistress, and a jealous one who brooks small sharing of her lover."

"Which is to say," snapped Sheila, "that for you she has no rival in this place. I must commend your frankness if I cannot say as much for your gallantry."

"What has gallantry to do with a hard worker like myself under professional engagement to my lord, your father?"

"Now, there you go again," said Sheila, hotly. "Is it not something that I have told you more than once of my conviction that you are a man of birth, and that Master Horrocks sees fit for some secret reason to lie about his

origin and yours? My father treats you as a son and feels for you as such, and you, in your high and mighty mock humility, make profession of an inferiority which you show in neither speech nor action."

"I am the mate of a slaver," said Ruderic, shortly. "The master's mate of any vessel is but a rough fellow, and a slaver is the most foul of all ships that swim. A buccaneer or pirate is a clean craft compared to it."

"Nobody who has got the wind of one can deny you that," said Sheila. "It is altogether an abominable traffic, and I for one have got my fill of it and of this deadly, noisome place. My father puts me off by constantly repeating that it is all for me. Well, then, I do not want it, and I have told him so. O'Conor Castle was bad enough in its gray dreariness, but it was tenfold better than this swampy inferno, with its swiving black demons chattering in the grip of fever until struck down by a poisonous serpent, or going mad and fleeing to perish in the jaws of alligators in river or morass. I am feverish myself, and even now my cheeks burn and my heart beats like one of these silly birds which pounds its red senseless head interminably against the trunk of a dead pine. You may feel how scorching are my hands," and she thrust them into Ruderic's palms calloused to the handling of gears. He held them a moment, then let them fall, his own heart pounding in a way which angered him.

But in that brief moment he had discovered that she spoke the truth and a sudden disgust possessed him, this not for the sake of Sheila's well-being, but for his future plans.

"I am no doctor," said he, coldly, "but I should advise that you take a draught of the infusion of Peruvian bark."

Sheila jerked back her hands into her lap. "I have drunk the nasty, bitter stuff until my ears are ringing like chimes, so that I do not know if these noises of clamoring

insects come from the wood and marshes or inside my head," she answered. Her voice choked. "Oh, Ruderic, why can you not be just a little kind? You fought and killed for your May, and the other day I saw you strike down one of your wicked crew for his maltreatment of a shackled black, yet you have nothing but cold unfriendliness for a poor girl that never did you any other ill than to be her father's daughter."

Ruderic pondered these words briefly. "I keep my place," he said, "and that is not to be your cavalier." But he was disturbed at what Sheila had told him, and, on the following day, spoke of the matter to O'Conor, who nodded.

"It has not escaped my notice that Sheila does not thrive here," said he. "I had already planned to take her northward for the summer, to Boston or, better yet, to one of the towns farther to the eastward which I have visited, Portland, a fair city in a fresh and temperate summer climate. But for the moment she must have change of air lest she fall sick, so I am tempted to take her with us on our run to Dominica."

Ruderic looked at him astonished. "But the slaves, sir," said he. "And the odors of the schooner. Her delicate gorge could not support the effluvium which saturates the vessel."

"As for the slaves," said O'Conor, "the weather is now fixed fair and they can be kept on deck in the waist. I shall purchase but a score picked blacks. The hold has been scoured and limed, and it may be fumigated by laying down an oven of brick and burning pine resin with the hatches snugly battened. The same shall be done in forecastle and cabin, which should remove all taint and leave a pleasant odor as of incense. The sea voyage should be a tonic for her blood and rinse it of the humors of this place."

So this purifying process was set about, but in the meanwhile an event occurred which shook Ruderic to the foundations of his resolve and placed him in curious relation to his prospective victim.

This singular adventure, the like of which has been reported by hunters in the southern forests, occurred of a hot day in May, the season when those not immune to fever do well to quit the rice lands for the summer months.

Perhaps because of malaria already in her blood, but more probably as the result of some far different hectic factor, Sheila found herself possessed of an intolerable restlessness. She would mount her horse and ride for hours to bring the poor beast back in a sorry state of lather, or she would play upon the harp or spinnet until scarce able to sit upright. Walking about her father had forbidden, because of the outrageous quantity of serpents that infested the place; the great diamond-backed rattler and the smaller varieties, a thick moccasin snake sunning itself to every foot of rice dike, and cane rattlers, and many poisonous spiders. There were also the caymans, which were wont to crawl out of the ooze and lie across the path besmeared with mud or sand, dried in the sun and a disguise for its sinister character, which was that of a fallen tree-trunk, whether black or bleached; and to heighten this illusion birds of different sorts would perch upon the monster's back, heron, or other waders, or the snowy aigrettes that nested in such profusion in the cypress tops. There were also panthers in the forest, and wild cats of lesser size but even greater ferocity, and wild hogs that did not stand upon the attack, great lean boars, red-eyed and sullen, with their wicked tusks, and what was equally dangerous at that season, sows, that, having recently pigged, were ever on the alert to attack with blind maternal courage any intruder who threatened the safety of their litter.

For in these days, all such savage beasts, from being seldom harried, had not learned the danger of humankind, and faced man boldly or even attacked on being disturbed, and were not yet taught that safety lay in flight. So that the dangers of swamp and forest were many and the explorer must be ever on the alert and with his weapon ready. There were also some few of the bolder and more intractable slaves who had escaped into the jungle, preferring a precarious existence of hardship to full rations with labor and the lash of the overseer.

This of necessity restricted Sheila's goings and comings to the narrow confines of the cleared space about the plantation house. Even the slaves worked afield with their limbs swathed to the hip in leggings of plaited straw secured by withes, and it was a common sight to see one pause and break the back of a serpent writhing with fangs entangled in this protective *paillon*.

Sheila, when she rode abroad, was accompanied always by her father when he happened to be at home or Mac Cann, the steward, a sober man of middle age, or Sambo the butler, a grizzled black of great stature and unquestionable courage and devotion, who would cheerfully have laid down his life in defense of his young mistress. But such attendance, while insuring safety, left much to be desired from the viewpoint of companionship, wherefore Sheila, in her restive mood one day, desired Ruderic to ride with her in the early morning, before the sun grew hot, to a sandy point at the river mouth where there was a *bateau* for the catching of fish, that were here plentiful and of excellent eating. The channel made into a bluff bank below which the water was deep and one could take bass and sea trout and drumfish and the like.

It was not for Ruderic to refuse this invitation, which was something in the nature of a command, so they mounted and rode away on the woodland trail. They

skirted a bay where the foliage was of a vivid waxy green, hard and lustrous, gum trees and magnolias and bay and juniper with long funereal festoons of Spanish moss, and in the treetops the big round globes of mistletoe, a softer green and studded with its pearls. A fury raccoon, in later years forced for safety to become a nocturnal creature, scurried across the trail and, running up a tree, eyed them curiously from a crotch, its ringed tail matching invisibly the crevices of bark in that defensive mimicry of nature which some moments later they remarked again in a great bronze turkey cock that ran ahead of them with sweeping strides, then took wing and boomed off into the brake.

On that soft May morning all nature seemed of intimate mood, as though some truce had been declared for the greater and common safety of young things which were tender and callow and inexperienced. On a pine barren they beheld a group of does, small gray mother deer with their mottled fawns, and these watched them innocently and in the fashion of creatures never hunted.

Ruderic carried a loaded musket across his saddle bow, but he had no desire to slay.

"I sometimes think," said he to Sheila, as the horses ambled gently on their way, "that my uncle is right in his claim that the human species is less the perfection of animal life than its pest. Lords of creation we may be, but cruel, tyrant lords who leave a devastation in their wake."

Sheila nodded. "There is some truth in such a theory," she agreed. "Nature, aside from the stern demand of its necessities, is kind. There are predatory beasts, but even these do not wantonly destroy."

"Man is the principal destroyer," said Ruderic, "not only of weaker creatures, but of his kind. It would seem that he serves himself of his higher intelligence for greed."

"As you would do," Sheila murmured.

"As I would do," he admitted. "Because I do but follow the fashion of my forbears in consistent manner. But let us not enter on such unpleasant argument. The day may come when you will understand better the obligation which drives me and be forced to admit the justice of it," and his face darkened suddenly, for they had come to the boundary between what had once been his father's grant and the poorer one of O'Conor, as yet unworked through lack of the requisite labor.

Here the fields, partially cleared for the planting of cotton, were overrun with second growth and, as they could see from the tracts and rootings, a pasture for wild hogs and cattle no less wild. A young bull wallowing in the slough heaved itself afoot, and eyed them sullenly, desiring yet not quite daring to challenge their passage. In a broad, shallow pool was a great flock of wild fowl; little wood-duck, the drakes bright in their fantastic plumage, and the long-legged tree duck, some of which were perched on low, overhanging boughs, and great blue heron; and across the spate a chattering colony of coots and oldwives, visitors of passage to the place on their northward journeys to summer haunts.

Sheila and Ruderic picked their way across the spongy ground and entered a park-like area of bald, piny woods where the big trees rose in a cleanly manner, widely spaced, and their great plumes hung in tassels of a fathom's length. Scattered under them was a growth of black-jack oaks of which the mast of acorns still littered the ground to furnish provender for so many of the wild creatures, cattle, and hogs and deer and turkey and the big fox squirrels with their fur of variegated colors, black or gray or buff, and of which they now saw many at food and play. The trail then turned down to the sandy beach of the

estuary's mouth as they came presently to the *bateau*, where they dismounted, and Ruderic tethered the horses under the shade of a live oak.

Sheila had brought fishing lines and a basket of crayfish for bait, and one of them she now threw out into the still water, when a great fish rose and took it almost as it struck the surface, to leave a sucking whirlpool.

Near the boat a log had stranded, or at least what looked to be a log, to deceive even the eyes of the pair. The pitch of the beach was very gentle and the boat heavy, so that it could not be hauled high enough to get aboard dry shod, and Ruderic, wading out, laid his musket on a thwart, then, taking the painter, began to haul the cumbersome craft to this log that Sheila might step into it, for he was disinclined to lift her in his arms and wade with her through the shallow water, though she might not have been averse to such transportation.

And this compunction came near to costing Sheila her life. For what they had taken to be a log was none other than a huge cayman, such as haunt the brackish waters of the lagoon, partly covered with sand for its disguise in the stalk of pig straying to the water's edge to root for mollusks.

Now as the hunters of these regions know the cayman has a sinister and stealthy trick of lying motionless until its prey venture within the sweep of its scaly tail, when, with a sudden swing of this, most unexpected in a creature of its sluggish habit, the monster may strike its quarry a fearful blow, which, being circular of motion, will often hurl it directly into the fearful jaws, opened suddenly for its reception, or failing this, so stun and cripple it that capture becomes easy.

And now as Sheila drew close to step upon the supposed log, and thus into the boat, this came near to happening.

Ruderic, almost alongside in the *bateau*, saw the

horrid, convulsive movement of the great mass, which of a sudden curved into an arc of half the circumference of a circle, and heard Sheila's scream of terror. The cayman was lying at the water's edge, its fore part up the beach and tail submerged, and as it lashed out with this and flung open its huge jaws Sheila was struck a glancing blow which hurled her not into the jaws but across the scabrous back of the saurian, which, having missed its coup, went suddenly astern from under her. But, as it backed into the shallows, it snapped again in sideways fashion and caught her by the fullness of the skirt, failing so narrowly to seize her by the knees that its frightful teeth rasped the skin, and so holding fast it began to drag her deeper.

Now Ruderic's mind was of the sort which, far from being paralyzed by shock, works the more quickly for such stimulus. Standing in the boat he was almost against the cayman, and, whipping up his primed musket from the thwart, he thrust the muzzle almost against the creature's mass behind the foreleg and pulled the trigger, then leaped down against the clenched jaws so that his own knee brushed them, and seizing Sheila about the waist tugged back for all the strength that was in him. Her riding skirt was torn away at the waist, but the grinning jaws had fastened on the sack in which was the bait, this slung about her shoulders by a strap of rawhide, and such is the tenacity of life of these creatures that although Ruderic's ball had torn its way through the tough hide and into the very heart of the cayman, it still backed away as though unscathed, hauling Sheila, and Ruderic clinging to her, into the deepening water.

All that saved them then was Ruderic's clear-mindedness, for he would not have loosed his hold. Embracing Sheila with one arm, he snatched the knife from his belt and slashed the strap, then, in a sort of frenzy of horror

and repulsion, he swarmed up directly over the loathsome snout and across the spiny neck, and, clinging there as best he might, he drove the long, keen blade into the eye which was set up in its sponson, as one might say, and struck it home with a blow of the ball of his hand upon the haft.

The effect of this vital thrust was terrific. Pierced through the brain, the only part of its anatomy to feel immediately this mortal wound, the cayman was flung into the flurry of its death throes. The powerful extensor muscles of its leg contracting, it leaped backward and in air hurling Ruderic, fortunately for him, to a distance where he scrambled up in water shoulder deep; and rushing back to Sheila, who, though conscious, was paralyzed with dread, he gathered her in his arms and bore her up the beach, where, sinking down in the loose sand, they watched the dying convulsions of the horrible monster.

These were not prolonged in their violence, though the long body continued its oscillations. Sheila, shuddering and moaning, flung her arms about the neck of Ruderic and buried her face against his chest that she might not witness them, nor had he the heart to disengage her. On the contrary, despite the profundity of his theoretic hatred and the many years which this had been fed and fanned by the reminiscences of Horrocks, he found himself soothing and gentling her as one might a little child taken up in arms from the throes of some terrific nightmare.

Chapter XV

O'CONOR and Horrocks were sitting on the veranda, sipping the sangaree prepared by Lanty, when Ruderic and Sheila rode up. The traces of the recent horror was stamped upon their white faces. Sheila swayed in the saddle and closed her eyes as Ruderic slipped from his horse and caught her as she toppled over. He carried her up the wide steps and O'Conor, who had sprung up from his seat, stared with amazement at their dripping clothes and noted the disarray of his daughter.

"Saints in heaven!" he cried, "and whatever has befallen?"

Sheila, whose splendid fortitude had endured up to this moment, was in a swoon. Ruderic, holding her in his arms, paused for an instant on the threshold.

"A fearful adventure, sir," he answered. "My lady must be got to bed with all haste, and do you send a boy on your best horse to fetch the doctor from Port Royal as soon as may be."

He went into the house, and, calling for Sambo to send Delphine, Sheila's mulatress maid, carried the unconscious girl to her room and laid her on the bed. O'Conor and Horrocks had followed him, and in a few brief words Ruderic described what had befallen.

"I do not think that any bones are broken," said he, "but she is grievously bruised from the blow dealt her by the tail of the cayman. Fortunately the impact was slowed from its immersion in the water and it struck her at the end of its scope."

Horrocks, who had no small skill in the treatment of the wounded, set himself to the care of Sheila, while Ruderic, now spent from having supported her in the saddle throughout their return, sank into a chair and gulped down the strong waters which O'Conor offered him. A black groom had been dispatched for the doctor, but Horrocks, turning presently from his examination, informed them that, though sadly bruised, Sheila had suffered no hurt beyond her appalling shock.

Strong girl that she was, she regained her consciousness as they were talking, and, having listened for a moment to what was being said, her lips curved in a smile.

"Ruderic is a most indifferent narrator," said she. "I have been listening to what he said, and from his account of the adventure one might think it to have been no more than a tug of war between him and the monster, with my bruised self as rope. But you must know, my dears, that he flung himself upon the cayman's head and plunged his knife into its eye, not knowing or caring at what moment it might see fit to open its jaws and make a mouthful of him."

"That it could not do," said Ruderic, "because I was atop of him;" and, at this naïf and boyish statement, O'Conor, in his tension, gave a great laugh in which Horrocks, for all of his displeasure at the episode, was forced to join.

But Lanty, who had been flitting about with aromatic vinegar and old cognac and healing unguents which the light-handed Delphine was now applying in soothing manner to her mistress's bruises, began to croon a little chantey as though to himself. It was in the Gaelic tongue with which the others were familiar more or less, and if he had sung it in his own tongue it would have been something of this sort:

"I'll fight ye for this prize," says Death,
"But do ye have a care,
For, if ye win, 'tis Life's own breath
To hould agin my share."
And when I'd won, Death looks at me
And gives his toothless grin;
"Tis yours, me lad, to guard," says he
"But hould fast what ye win,
For if ye loose your grip av it
Mind ye, I'm always nigh,
'Tis now a part av you," says he,
"So keep it closely by.
I'll have it yet, on land or sea
Should aught still go awry."

"Enough, Lanty," said Horrocks, frowning. "You go too far—"

"Faith and he does not," said O'Conor, and rose. "For my part, Master Horrocks, I am precisely of such advice; that he who saves a life, especially if it be at the risk of his own, assumes the same responsibility for it as though it were of his creation. Even your philosophy cannot deny this salient fact that, he having left events to pursue their natural course, the future problems of this victim must have been removed. But, having by his interference retained the individual to the facing of them, he assumes a sort of guardianship, such as might exist in the case of a parent who has caused a life to be brought into the world or—" he glanced at Sheila, then looked deliberately at Ruderic—"a husband or similar protector who becomes vested with a sponsorship for her weal from this epoch."

Sheila turned her head on the pillow. "And what is your opinion of the matter, Ruderic," she asked.

Ruderic set down his glass. "It is sound logic, my lady," said he, "and not to be denied. The same would hold true of any of your protectors here. But it must be remembered that you were in my care at the time, and so

in rendering this service I was not incurring obligation, but discharging it."

A flash of satisfaction shot from Horrocks's eyes, which had been anxious up to this moment.

"Such precisely is the case," said he. "It is one thing to step out of one's path for the altering of a life's destiny, and quite another to avert catastrophe from one's proper charge. According to your reason, sir, the able ship's master, through the skill and devotion of whom the vessel weathers the gale, thus assumes as sacred trust, the future welfare of all the lives aboard, whereas, from my point of view and Ruderic's, he does but accomplish his duty—" and then, as though assuming this argument to be final and unanswerable, he turned to Ruderic. "Go now and change, lad, for you invite the fever to sit thus in sodden clothes."

The doctor from Port Royal, setting out with all dispatch, left the black groom laboring in his wake and arrived with a good mount badly blown and far more in need of skilled service than was the patient. From the groom's account, which was embroidered with African imagination, the medical man had gathered that the acknowledged belle of the region had been thoroughly masticated and partly swallowed by a cayman, which, on the receipt of a mortal wound had ejected its tender prey in the manner of Jonah's whale. The skilled man was therefore considerably surprised to find Sheila propped among her pillows, fanned by a black urchin of whom the face was chiefly eyes and teeth, and to discover a brightness in her violet eyes which was not the glistening of fever, and a delicate flush upon her cheeks of origin no more febrile.

Mr. Calhoun, the surgeon conducted his examination with habitual thoroughness and dispatch, then patted the patient's hand and told her to be of good cheer, and

went out in some anxiety to discover if his horse were any the worse for his rapid journey at the hottest moment of the day. Reassured upon this point he returned to the house, and was shown into the private office of O'Conor.

"Your daughter is but little the worse for her misadventure, sir," said he. "The contusions will disable her for perhaps a week, but thanks to a robust constitution, and high courage of an unusual type, there are scarcely any evidences of the nervous shock to be expected from an episode so fearsome. Most young ladies would be now in a state of absolute collapse or raving in the delirium of a cerebral fever."

"There has never been any fear at all in my daughter," said O'Conor, "but a considerable amount of fight," and added, dryly, "which, no doubt runs in the breed, and having skipped myself is concentrated in Sheila."

The doctor raised his eyebrows but did not dispute the point. Yielding to Sheila's soft urgency he had become party to a small conspiracy, and now set himself to the fulfillment of his promise.

"I find my patient, however, in a state of mental discontent," said he, "which may react upon her health and spirits, especially at this season that now approaches, the danger limit for Europeans, especially be they young. At this moment I observe that the water has been let in on the rice fields, but a few days hence, when you get a good stance of rice, you will be drawing off the water, when there will be a fetor over the fields with miasmas, germinative of malaria. It is at these moments that the risk is very great, not only in the inhalations of these poisons but in that factor I am convinced to be causative of fever, which is the carrying of the infection by verminous insects. These, spawning in the stagnant pools, become infused with the contagion and transmit it to the individual by their crawlings and stings and

pollution of the drinking water. I should therefore most urgently commend you to remove your daughter from this region as soon as she is fit to travel, which should be in the course of some few days."

"Such is my intention," said O'Conor. "My schooner is being scoured and cleansed and fumigated and I purpose to take Sheila with me on our next voyage."

"Then let that be a northward one," said the doctor, who had heard rumors of O'Conor's employment of his swift, mysterious vessel. "Take her to New York or Newport rather than for a cruise in the torrid waters of the Gulf Stream. I advise this not only for the change of temperature, but because your daughter has become intolerant of being constantly in the atmosphere of blacks. This race is repellent to many organizations so delicately adjusted as her own. There is a racial antipathy which produces a sort of nervous excitation and apprehension injurious to the whole economy."

"I'm afraid, my dear sir," said O'Conor, "that Sheila will have to learn to adjust herself to that."

The doctor snorted. "Such is not a lesson to be learned, O'Conor," said he, with the freedom of speech which his importance and acknowledged learning gave him. "My thoroughbred mare—which I trust has not been injured by the speed of my journey here, has learned not to shy nor bolt nor wheel upon her tracks and leave me in the ditch on passing a canebrake where a bear has browsed, or following this animal's track should it have taken to the trail not long before. But she breaks into a sweat which in time becomes a lather, and I can feel the trembling of her withers between my knees, and should this tension last for some distance she becomes so tormented in her spirit that for hours after she refuses to touch her fodder. The same perversity is true of Sheila in her forced intercourse with Africans. With due acknowledgment of

your necessities, I would say that you act very wrongly to keep her longer in their midst. You may purchase slaves at will, but you cannot purchase another daughter."

O'Conor nodded. "You are right, Mr. Calhoun," said he. "I shall follow your advice," and this he stated with a mental reservation. He clapped his hands and ordered wine and other refreshments, after which the worthy doctor, a man whose learning was many years ahead of his time, mounted his beautiful mare, now ready for the road, and took his departure.

O'Conor then sent for Ruderic, who had bathed and freshly clothed himself, and told him of what the doctor had decreed.

"We shall make this one more voyage," said O'Conor, "as I have great need of at least a dozen more picked blacks. Then, tarrying here no longer than is necessary, we shall cruise northward to dispose of Sheila for the summer months."

"And then, my lord?" asked Ruderic.

"Then we shall return, and I may require your clear-headed engineering knowledge for the laying out of the work of reclamation. Now mark you, Ruderic, you are henceforth no hireling. I have herewith the honor to offer you a partnership in the promotion and operation of this plantation, which should be the largest under single management on the whole Atlantic coast." He raised his hand. "Do not interrupt. My reasons for this are several. I am beholden to you for the vessel which makes the fulfillment of my object possible. I esteem you for your honesty and high attainments, and, after what has happened this day, I am under a debt of obligation to you which mere money can never discharge. Despite the arguments of Master Horrocks and your own none too gracious reception of my gratitude, the fact remains that, but for your devoted courage and swift action, Sheila

would have met with a fate on which the mind cannot bear to dwell." He looked intently at Ruderic. "Once before I said that there was little you might ask which I could find it in my heart to refuse. I would now amend that statement by telling you there is nothing."

The blood crept slowly into Ruderic's face. He had anticipated some such focus of O'Conor's growing favor for him and had dreaded it. There could be no question of what O'Conor had in mind. His words were obviously no less than the offer to make of him his successor and part heir to his estate and, were Ruderic to say the word, a joint heir as the husband of Sheila.

Ruderic knew that to refuse such liberality would be a dire affront to the pride, and a crippling blow at the esteem, in which O'Conor held him. But the crucial instant had arrived and must be faced, and Ruderic, in counsel with Horrocks, had already determined on the manner in which he was to meet it.

"Your lordship does me infinite honor and offers to reward me far beyond my merits," said he. "The results of my invention have, I must admit, turned out most happily. As for the service rendered to-day I can only repeat that herein is no fresh obligation entailed, but one I had assumed, discharged.

"But since your lordship is pleased to ask me to name my reward, I shall do so in all frankness and from the viewpoint of our mutual gain, setting aside at the moment our social relationship, which is so unequal."

O'Conor frowned. It occurred suddenly to his astute mind that he had promised more than he cared to fulfill and that should Ruderic prefer the request, which, for some reason O'Conor could not explain, had remained spiked in his head and that of Horrocks as though treenailed—or trunnelled, as shipwrights say, he would find much difficulty whether in sticking to his word or the evasion of it.

And Ruderic did not disappoint him in this unpleasant foreboding, for he said, with the usual directness of his free speech, "This last voyage should give the plantation its full complement of slaves and as many as it can very well support. But the purchase of them has been a heavy tax upon your funds, and I understand that you have found it necessary to negotiate a loan.

"Therefore, sir, I would strongly urge that we make attempt to pay off this loan as speedily as possible and in a manner of which we have the resource here at hand. If this schooner of ours is by virtue of her qualities adapted to swift flight, so is she no less adapted to swift attack and subsequent escape. Now, as your lordship knows, the Bahama Banks and Dominica and Tortuga and other islands swarm at this moment with buccaneers who have enriched themselves by preying on defenseless merchant ships."

"And you are still so mad as to wish to do the same?" demanded O'Conor, with a frown.

"Not quite that, my lord," said Ruderic. "I would prey in turn upon the buccaneers until such time as we have filled your coffers, which must be to some extent depleted by the purchase of slaves. These butchers and smokers of beef and swine are but a poor scurvy crew of blackguards at the best, cruel and ferocious to peaceful folk, but cowardly knaves when met by good fighting men, determined on a fierce offensive. Now our own crew are not many in number, but men of proven courage and lust of combat and greed for gold. Dirk alone is worth half a score of slinking cattle-killers, and so is Yellow Jack, though I abominate the scoundrel, and so, for that matter, are the rest of them. They are restive and discontent and grow daily more hard to hold. Let us then slip the leash from these sea hounds for a venture or two, and thereby make a bold bid and a short cut for fortune."

O'Conor's face showed how sorely he was disturbed at this suggestion, which for months had hovered like a black genii in the background of his operation, and which, so far, he had contrived to hold at bay.

"But such a plan is unwarranted, Ruderic," he protested. "It is not necessary. We are already on the high road to fortune. Such a program would be as mad as for a train of merchants, returning laden with the profits of their expedition, to halt upon the road and turn aside to attack some robber stronghold. Moreover, while it may not be actual piracy to plunder pirates, yet is it as unlawful as it might be for the said merchants to possess themselves of plunder robbed from honest men, then not make restitution of it to its proper owners."

"As for the stronghold," said Ruderic, "we may cruise in search of these sea wolves and force them to disgorge where we happen to strike them. We may even decoy them to the attack of ourselves, though it would be better to swoop on one which, having taken its prize, seeks to escape with a full maw. And as for the lawfulness there is little law in these seas and even less enforcement of it. We would be in the nature of a privateer."

"*Sans the lettre de marque,*" said O'Conor, dryly.

"I do not think," said Ruderic, coolly, "that we would be under compulsion to exhibit one to any. My uncle knows these reefs and shoals and cays as a rabbit knows the whins, and *Hirondelle* would be as quick to dive in them or find her hole between the rocks and bars as any coney on your Irish cliffs. I do not say that I should advise continuing such venture for any length of time, but merely long enough to clear the estate from all encumbrance with some small fund to work on. Thereafter your lordship might leave the administration to Mac Cann on shares as previously, and return to your estate in Ireland or go to France or wherever it best pleases you and your daughter."

A dark figure loomed in the long window which gave upon the porch. There was a slight rapping on the shutters. The pair looked up and saw Horrocks's massive form without. O'Conor bade him enter, which he did, his rugged face wearing a grim if apologetic smile.

"Troth, you old sea-lion," said O'Conor, "I believe you have been eavesdropping."

"I must plead guilty to the charge," Horrocks rumbled, in his cavernous voice. "Had not your argument concerned me so closely I should have taken myself off. As it is, never have I heard a venture more soundly proposed than by my nephew, and I might offer to suggest, sir, that it strikes me you are by your first statement to no small degree committed to accede to it."

O'Conor writhed upon his seat. He was as bold as any, of no more compunction than most planters and gentlemen adventurers of his epoch. But he was by nature primarily the man of affairs, and his sound business judgment rebelled against this wild counsel of assuming great unnecessary risk.

But now he found himself outclassed by these two men of inflexible purpose and the determination to gain their ends, no matter at what cost of his displeasure. He had passed his word to grant any request of Ruderic, and even the word of such as he was not without its value. So, caught thus between the upper and nether millstones, and both of these of granite, O'Conor's subtlety was of slight avail. Before the darkness fell he had unwillingly agreed to their demands, this consentment albeit with certain mental reservations of his own. For it was as easy to place the finger upon a drop tilted from a column of mercury—the barometer of the day—as to pin down O'Conor firmly to any distasteful agreement, and he trusted to the trend of circumstance to keep him from serious compromise.

Chapter XVI

HIRONDELLE was gliding gently toward the southeastern entrance of the old Bahama Channel under a faint and fickle draught of air that promised to freshen and steady its slant with the sunrise, almost at hand.

The sea about lay smoothly flat as the waters of a still lake. Hither and yon catpaws struck down to rough its surface for areas of various extent and left between them the bland oily lanes of which landsmen require the reason, this being, as sailors know, that where the faint breeze glances upward in its ricochet, there is naught to mar the glassy polish. Lacy wisps of cloud began to crimson in the fathomless blue directly overhead. In the schooner's foretop a hand sent up on lookout gazed down upon a curious picture; the long, graceful, fusiform shape of deck which seemed hanging suspended on the flood of indigo so clear and still that he could stare deeply into it and observe the life and animation it contained. Shoals of flying fish of a translucent green swam in those depths, and at the impending bulk above them would grow suddenly affrighted and dart to the surface to skitter away on filmy wings until these dried, to render further flight impossible. Beneath their surface evolutions drifted larger fish of gaudy color, cruising in search of prey with senses ever alert that they be not prey themselves, the everlasting chain of destruction of the sea.

A great tiger shark, banded and fine of outline, sculled on the schooner's quarter with a motion of its long pointed upper fluke scarce perceptible to the watcher's eye. Like

a sinister familiar it seemed to drift in her companionship in automatic fashion, as though the shadow of some part of her, and looking closer one saw the monster's guide and vicarious intelligence in the delicate and darting form of its little friend and parasite, the pilot fish.

A gleaming barracuda darted from the depths in swift foray upon the flying fish which spattered out like an inverted gust of hail, when the rapacious hunter, singling out its quarry, kept pace with it beneath the surface, and when its aerial course was ended, to let it fall bewildered, took profit of this momentary mazement to make a breakfast.

But to the masthead lookout, the scene upon this detached fragment of the earth must have been far more curious than that of the aqueous realm supporting it. In the waist of the schooner were a score of hulking human forms, bare and glistening and black as though hewn from ebony. These were the recent purchases which had been the mission of the schooner's voyage, the African blacks selected from many hundred with the judgment of long experience, which took into account not only bone and sinew and the prime of physical condition, but temperamental traits as shrewdly estimated from features and expression such as the trader unaccustomed to such traffic could not assay.

For O'Conor sought not only physical but mental attributes, and had a fine discrimination in choosing slaves who, in his judgment, would prove docile and industrious and in time even faithful and contented. His was not a cruel mastery, nor was it slovenly in its care of these valuable cattle.

They were housed with thoughtful consideration of their comfort and requirements, as beeves of pure race might have been stabled, and their food was plentiful and nourishing, so that they passed through none of those

epochs of famine which might even have befallen in their native homes. His overseers had instructions to spare the lash, and they were bred and mated with a view to their contentment and the augmentation of their numbers.

O'Conor had made his selection with even more than his usual care on this voyage, which was to be the last for such object. The fortune that had favored his traffic of this sort had not deserted him, and he had happened on some marabouts, superior blacks from the Sahara, fine of skin and feature and known to attain great age and a vigor which did not fail them to the end.

They were not even shackled, but crouched upon or moved about the decks at will, physically content if not actually happy at such a grateful change from the terrible treatment suffered previously. They were sated with good food, paddy and yams and bananas and other tropic fruit, and they were clean and their great limbs healing from the scars of irons and cruel blows. Also they were partially clad for the cooler air and dews at nightfall, and, that they might not prove offensive to Lady Sheila when she came on deck, their freedom aboard being limited to that part of the waist which was abaft the slight break of the forecastle and the mainmast, where a boundary rope was stretched from side to side. The raised quarter deck was removed, and, as aboard all ships where discipline obtains, the master's zone, where not even a sailor was permitted save in the discharge of some duty.

Horrocks and Ruderick were seated on the broad quarter rail conversing in low tones. O'Conor was still at his repose.

"We can look for nothing on this voyage beyond a quick and profitable one," rumbled Horrocks. "Were a filthy buccaneer loaded scuppers deep with booty to shove up over the sky line athwart our course, O'Conor would sheer off and slip away for very fear lest a bullet find its

mark in one of yon high-priced beasts of the field. And he would be right, for never have I seen a better handful of blacks."

"They are curious folk," said Ruderic. "Almost from the very start, when they had been sluiced with draw-buckets of sea-water and fed a satisfying meal, they began to grin and chatter. It is certain that Nature fashioned them for such service."

"Be that as it may," said Horrocks, "the trade has such abuses as to be unjustifiable. O'Conor, for all his past scoundrelism, is not inhumane—but that is because he is a man of a no small intelligence," he added, grudgingly.

"This morning," said Ruderic, "I stretched Yellow Jack for striking one of the blacks who got in his way. I have small use for Yellow Jack. He is up to some sort of mischief, I am sure, but restrained from villainy through fear of Dirk." He stared forward moodily to where the man in question was stitching a topsail rent in a sudden squall the day before. "I think," muttered Ruderic as though conversing with himself, "that comes some tempestuous night, I shall take him by the scruff of the neck and drop him overside into the smother."

"That might not be an act amiss," assented Horrocks. "He has richly merited hanging so often in his past, and is surely destined to be hanged in the future; and since he hates you and bides time for his revenge such treatment of him would be not only one of humanity but expediency as well. But for some reason O'Conor seems to value the yellow hound."

"O'Conor has ears which do not grow entirely on his own head," said Ruderic. "But if these lugs were such as need be reckoned with, our partnership must have been dissolved before the forming of it. He is now so pleased with us and his success that he does little but rub his hands and smile." He frowned and looked thought-

fully in the quarter whence they awaited the birth of the new breeze. "I sometimes find it hard to believe that he has the depths for such villainy as we know he has performed."

"A man may smile and smile and still be a villain,"" quoted Horrocks, "and as for his depths, the waters of a man's blackguardism are apt to shoal when he has no longer need of such for his ambition."

Ruderic smote the rail with his clenched fist. "O'Conor is now in the fairway of such prosperity at my cost," said he, "that I wonder at his giving ear at all to my insistence on the gentle sport of buccaneering. Of what value is a promise to such a man? Having squeezed the juice from our minds and bodies to his profit, why should he take more interest of us? Why should he not send us both about our business with a "*merci . . . et au revoir?*"

"Perhaps that may be his future intention in our regard," said Horrocks, dryly, "but still, I do not think so. There might be more avarice in his nature than his methods portray, and more of daring and of the gambler's passion. The points you offered for his inspection were well taken, lad, and his crafty brain was not indifferent to them. But there is still another factor at work, and one of the deepest importance. Whatever this man's greed and treachery and crime he loves his daughter with a love which is focused in her to the exclusion of all other emotions, and his one ambition is to secure for her a vast estate. I think that he feels insecure as regards his health, for he told me one day that he suffered an affection of the heart. He is therefore most desirous to clinch on the inside the nail of his fortunes, and to see her wedded to one in whom he has all confidence and whom she most desires to wed. On this account he may have decided to follow our counsel and make a bold bid for the solid establishment of his affairs."

"And because of his trust in me," said Ruderic, bitterly, "and because of Sheila's marked favor in my direction, he flings her constantly at my head."

Horrocks nodded, then eyed him keenly. "Can you honestly say that you are not attracted to the girl?" he asked, bluntly.

Ruderic's face grew dark. "She attracts me as no doubt my mother attracted him," he muttered, "and nothing more."

But Horrocks had not heard; for at that moment there came a cry from overhead, and looking aloft they saw the lookout pointing with outstretched arm at some object directly ahead that had caught his roving eyes. Then this became visible to those on deck. Horrocks and Ruderic leaped to their feet and, standing on the rail holding to the davits of the quarter-boat, stared across the water to see rising over the horizon what looked at first to be the tip of a pink cloud, but which their experience told them was the upper canvas of a ship. It was no great distance off and should have been sighted sooner by the lookout, but owing to the pallor of a background into which the vessel's sails had been absorbed they had not become distinctly visible until the rim of the red sun, thrusting up above the sky line, had given them a wash of rosy color.

Horrocks stepped to the companionway and took his big telescope from the rack and focused it upon the tall stranger.

"A great ship of the line," said he. "A frigate of perhaps a hundred guns. She is beating down through the fairway, cruising no doubt from some northern port to Kingstown," and leaning over the hatch he called to Lanty to rouse his master and tell him that a man-o'-war was sighted ahead.

O'Conor came up immediately, half clad, then scrutinized the stately stranger.

"I do not seem to recognize that vessel," said he, "but there can be no doubt as to its character. If we pass her close aboard she will desire to speak us and send a boat alongside, so we had best give her a wide berth. She may give chase but that does not greatly matter, as we should soon outfoot her."

It became then immediately evident that the frigate had been keeping them under her eye. No doubt they had been long visible to a keener-eyed lookout at the crow's nest of her towering mast, and now this change of course confirmed her previous suspicion. She was not of the type of vessel set to the catching of buccaneers, which task was relegated to pinnaces and sloops of war and small smart ketches mounting half a score of guns and well manned with hardy fighting crews, so that for this regal ship to lend herself to the pursuit of a small schooner was in the nature of a Bengal tiger hunting rats.

Yet a chase is a chase, so that a full hunting field may find diversion in harrying a little fox, and it became quickly evident that here was no clumsy floating fortress but a smart sailor that would give them a proper chase. Moreover, the best of the breeze was aloft, so that her high canvas got much that wafted above the trucks of *Hirondelle*.

It would have been easy for O'Conor, so far to windward of the frigate, to have turned tail and beat back upon his tracks, in which case they must quickly have dropped her below the horizon. But there seemed no necessity for doing this, and he was in haste to get back with his slaves. Wherefore he instructed Ruderic so to handle the schooner as to pass the man-o'-war with a sufficient margin of safety from her guns and in disregard of her signaled order to heave to.

This accordingly they proceeded to do, and Sheila, coming presently on deck, the chase assumed the pleasant

and exhilarating character of a sporting event rather than the grim business of pursuit for capture, confiscation and heavy penalties.

The breeze freshened until the indigo waves were flecked with snowy crests. And the great frigate, close-hauled on a bowline as she strove to head *Hirondelle* from her objective point, showed a broad band of gleaming copper, now like ruddy gold, now sending out flashes of flame according to the angle of her inclination.

It was an easy matter for *Hirondelle* to widen her berth at will, running free as she was, and needing only to haul a little on the wind, and her saucy contempt when standing in so closely to her huge pursuer was not unlike that of a little dog which gambols about a vexed and clumsy cow. But Ruderic kept well beyond the chance of even a stray shot from a gun, possibly of new and unknown range, and it was not long before they found themselves cutting across the frigate's course some five or six miles ahead of her, and she, apparently deciding that here would be a waste of time to ease off and continue the chase of this flitting swallow, was holding on rigidly for her destination. But suddenly, to the vast surprise of those aboard the schooner, she appeared to alter this intention. Her helm was swung up, the sheets of her vast sails were eased, and a moment later she was standing off directly in their wake.

Horrocks looked at Ruderic and O'Conor with a grim smile, the nearest that he ever came to the betrayal of amusement.

"She has concluded to chivy us for what her sailing qualities are worth," said he, "this course being that of her greatest speed, which may, in a vessel of her long hull and huge spread of canvas, be almost if not quite the equal of our own. That will be a new ship and for aught we know a very smart one. We had best haul again on

the wind and sacrifice some distance to getting well clear of her sweeping skirts. It is not likely that the wind fail us, as it is a steady trade at this season. But if such should happen it would be the end of us, as she would put overside her boats and quickly lay us aboard."

Ruderic therefore ordered sheets trimmed flat and the helm thrust down to bring the schooner as closely into the wind as she could sail, luffing for a moment that the drop keel slide down to its fullest extent. But several minutes later the reason for this maneuver of the frigate became alarmingly apparent. Those on deck heard a startled cry from the masthead lookout and Ruderic, running halfway up the rigging saw, far off on the weather bow, first one small white sail and then, presently, another on their weather beam. The frigate's lookout from his greater altitude had seen and reported these new factors in the chase, and the big vessel had spread her net accordingly, knowing doubtless, or merely hoping, that here were two whippet-hounds to aid in the cutting off of the suspicious schooner.

Ruderic slipped down to the deck and walked aft with a glow in his amber-colored eyes.

"I make them out to be a brigantine and a sloop of war of fairish size," said he. "The latter is, I think, the *Blackbird*, which we came upon one day in the fog and gave the slip by running through the cays off Cape Sable. We had best jibe over and stand away to the north'ard for the edge of the Great Bahama Bank."

So the order was given and smartly carried out when the frigate followed the maneuver in the deliberate fashion of such big square-rigged vessels, wearing ship with great flapping of canvas and bracing about of yards.

Hirondelle took advantage of this loss of time to get well upon her course. And then, as those aboard her were beginning to felicitate themselves on having turned and

darted out of the mouth of the net before the purse cord could be drawn, there appeared another sail ahead, and a point or two to windward, this also, as they reckoned from its rig and the whiteness of its canvas which was new or scoured recently, a government vessel.

"Troth!" cried O'Conor, "but we have run into a cordon of them!"

"It is a squadron which has been set to sweep the passage like a drag for the mopping up of buccaneers and pirates and such loose free-trading gentry as ourselves," said Horrocks, "and, for aught we know, there may be still others under our lee. The breeze is beginning to fling a haze across the sea and we had best mind our eye. Now let them follow if they like and we shall show them a trick on which they had not counted, and which may prove to their undoing."

He cast his eyes about, noted the position of the sun, and stepping to the compass glanced at it and gave his course to the quartermaster.

"Ease the sheets," he ordered.

"Where are we heading now?" O'Conor asked.

Horrocks gave his grim laugh. "I propose to lead the chase whither I doubt if any of them will care to follow, sir," said he. "That is smack across the Great Bahama Bank, to come out on the Tongue of the Ocean, which licks down betwixt Andros and the string of cays which are the western rim of Exuma Sound with Eleuthera Island to the north of it."

"And is there water?" O'Conor demanded.

"There is no lack of water, sir, if one can but keep his vessel floating in it," Horrocks answered. "But it is riddled with shoals and coral reefs and a fringe of sandbars like the beard of a goat on the northern edge. This labyrinth I explored when sailing with Redbeard and it is precisely for the threading of such that *Hirondelle* is best

adapted. For with this free wind we have no need of our drop-keel and so may schoon, as Dirk says, over the flats. It is a long pull to the hole I am hunting, but before we strike it we shall wave them a farewell with the tack of our topsail."

O'Conor, now grown anxious at having pitched head foremost into a squadron of patrolling vessels, left the matter to his pilot. Yet he was not altogether sorry to find himself thus placed, for here was an argument in strong disfavor of such a course as Horrocks and Ruderic had advocated and which seemed to bear him out strongly in his assertions that the game of freebooting in these waters was no longer worth the candle.

So, with the pursuing vessels standing after from various quarters, *Hirondelle*, like a fleeing fox in view halloo of huntsmen and hounds, slipped through the rising swell *ventre à terre*, or more accurately speaking, *ventre à l'eau*. Before an hour had passed she was well clear of those astern. But the vessel ahead, which proved to be a barkentine and herself no laggard, had laid a course to head her off and, her distance being shorter to the point of intersection, it grew evident to all that the rub would be a close one.

"The danger lies not in her," said Horrocks, who had been narrowly watching the relative progress of hunter and hunted. "But if by ill chance we were to sight another vessel of the squadron on our lee bow, we should find ourselves in something of a box."

"Should worse come to worst," said O'Conor, pausing in his nervous pacing to and fro, "we can always consign our black cargo to the waves."

Sheila sprang up with a cry of protest against this cruel decision. "That we cannot do, father. Such an act would be unworthy of Christian gentlemen. Black slaves they may be, but yet they are humans. My heart goes

out to these poor savages, and to see them now for the first time in some comfort and contentment after the cruel treatment they have suffered."

"The fault would not be ours," said O'Conor, "but that of the smug lawmakers who decree in so arbitrary fashion that an honest man shall be punished for seeking in the only manner possible to augment his fortune and to develop the resources of the newly formed United States. On their heads be it."

"Nevertheless," cried Sheila, "I could never endure it. I would rather that we surrendered and paid the penalty, whether of fine or imprisonment or whatever it may be;" she turned to Horrocks with an appealing gesture. "Some time ago you expressed yourself to me in similar fashion about this traffic, Master Horrocks. Do you not now agree that it would be a foul stain upon our honor and upon our souls to commit so wholesale a murder?"

"Why as to our honor, my lady," rumbled Horrocks, "that is entirely as your father sees it, for the slaves are his property and he commands here; and as to our souls, they are an abstract quality in which, as you may know, I have slight belief even as to the very existence of such."

"And you, Ruderic," cried Sheila.

Ruderic moistened his lips. "As I see it, my lady," said he, "were I one of these blacks I should consider myself infinitely better off for a short shrift in the brine than a long one under the lash, and riddled with the fever to which we know they are not immune, as commonly supposed. But one thing is certain, that your father would be a fool to suffer penal servitude for the sake of a handful of blacks worth perhaps the matter of a thousand pounds, and which he can manage to do without. Such wrong as may be done has been already done, and the drowning of them is but a doubtful one in addition."

O'Conor threw him a grateful look. "Now there speaks

a man of sense," said he. "Let us look at this question from the standpoint of practicality."

"From that of cruel tyranny," stormed Sheila, and added, hotly, "I should rather spend the rest of my days in gaol than have my soul stained by such a horrid crime."

"Set your mind at rest, my lady," said Horrocks, soothingly. "We are giving this fellow the slip as we have his mates. In two hours' time, at this pace, we should skim over the shoals where he dare not follow."

But, despite Horrocks's words, it was nip and tuck and presently O'Conor, who had been biting his finger ends, stepped to the break of the poop and called to Yellow Jack, who, with a group of the savage-looking crew, was watching the barkentine now, less than a mile away and foaming down, a bone in the teeth of her, as sailors speak of the foam beneath the bows.

"Put the shackles on the slaves," ordered O'Conor in a rasping voice. "Have them squat down on deck below the bulwarks, and secure and make fast a slung shot to the ankle irons of each."

In silence, profound and sinister, the order was obeyed. But this was rent almost immediately by the moans and supplications of the wretched negroes as their dulled wits suddenly awoke to the fate which seemed impending for them. Sheila, unable to support it, sprang to her father's side and burst into passionate weeping.

"Father, you must not do this thing! You shall not!" she wailed. "If you commit this crime, you are no longer to consider me your daughter. I will never touch a farthing of the fortune for which you pay by the loss of your immortal soul."

O'Conor, his face white and set, freed himself from her clasp. "Go below, daughter," said he. "As I have told you the deed is not of my choosing but one of stern compulsion."

Sheila for once refused him her obedience. She clung to him sobbing and imploring until, in a sudden outburst of impatience, he turned to Ruderick, who was standing by, his face set and white and grim.

"Take this foolish child below, Ruderick," cried O'Conor, "and keep her there, in Heaven's name, until I order her released. At any moment we may get a shot from the bow chaser of yon meddlesome hound."

"I think, my lord," said Horrocks, "that we could reach her, even now, with our own pivot gun on the forecastle."

"God forbid!" cried O'Conor. "Are you determined to run my neck into a noose?" and he glared wrathfully at the pilot. "Why not ease the sheets and run away from her?"

"We can outfoot her as we are running, sir," Horrocks answered, "and should we run past and into the maw of another ship we could scarcely beat up to the entrance for this fellow."

O'Conor, in a frenzy of fear and desperation, looked down into the waist, where Yellow Jack was eying him expectantly. At the same moment there rose from the bows of the barkentine a round white puff, and they saw the splash of a solid shot where it struck the water some quarter of a mile short.

O'Conor was about to give the order which should doom the slaves when Sheila rushed to him and flung her hands across his mouth. He struggled free of her, and turned on Ruderick with blazing eyes.

"I bade you take her below," he snarled. "Will you obey or must I call to Yellow Jack to carry out the order?"

Ruderick, in sullen silence, clasped Sheila about the waist and, despite her struggles, swung her through the hatch and half carried, half dragged her down the steps of the companion.

But at the same moment the wily Horrocks who, per-

haps, had desired to create this dissension between father and daughter, bellowed his orders to ease main and fore-sheets, and man the windlass to haul up the drop keel.

At the execution of these orders *Hirondelle* swung sharply on her shallow rockered keel and, presenting a tapered stern to her pursuer, foamed away with quickening speed. O'Conor observed the maneuver with a face in which relief and anger struggled for supremacy.

"Why did you not do this sooner?" he demanded.

"For the reasons which I gave you, sir," answered Horrocks, calmly. "I do not wish to lose more ground to windward than is forced upon us, but the next shot from that fellow might have hulled us," and as he spoke there came another white puff, followed by a distant report, and this time the shot fell even shorter than before.

Below, in the cabin, Sheila was raving like a girl gone daft, while Ruderic, his back against the door, stood with folded arms and surveyed her silently.

"My father is a brute—you are all brutes," cried Sheila, passionately. "You call yourself a man, yet you will stand by and see these poor wretches thrown into the sea."

"I obey the master's orders," Ruderic answered.

Sheila drew herself up and stared at him with eyes which had suddenly grown dark as sapphires. "My first findings of you were the true ones," said she, bitterly. "You are possessed of a devil—" she crossed herself. "You are an enemy to human kind through some fancied wrong which I cannot guess the nature. But if you would revenge yourself why not then do so against those who work this wrong, and not against poor wretches who have already suffered grievously and against whom you have no quarrel. Seek out your enemies, and reek your vengeance on their heads."

"All in good time, my lady," murmured Ruderic, softly.

Chapter XVII

“WHY did you cut her so finely, uncle?” Ruderic asked as, an hour later, he stood with Horrocks at the wheel. Three miles astern the barkentine was still churning in hopeless pursuit. The other vessels, leaving to her the doubtful effort, had hauled off upon their several courses. “Another minute and O’Conor would have cast overside the blacks.”

“A simple question, lad,” Horrocks answered, “though my motive is a dual one. I desired, for one thing, that O’Conor should reveal himself for the cold-blooded and inhuman beast he is, and this before his daughter. But, more than that, I was determined that the barkentine should have full opportunity to look this schooner over in all her detail, so that there be no mistake in future as to her identity. But,” he chuckled, “I calculated closely on the range of her bow chaser. That will be a good gun, and no poor gunner who laid it, for the shot did not fall greatly short, and was perfectly aligned for our main rigging. There is, however, that about the business which disturbs me. For all his villainy, I had given Black O’Conor more credit as a man of courage and daring, yet was he blanched as an apprentice lad when clearing ship for his first action.”

“There was his daughter to consider,” Ruderic answered, “and we know that she is dearer to him than life or liberty.”

“Such may have been the reason for his look and conduct,” Horrocks answered. “But he may soon be far more seriously committed if I can carry on my plans. ‘It’s

dogged as does it,' as sailors say, and yon trailer of ours has the air of a dogged brute. No doubt he reckons that he can follow where we lead, for he is smaller than ourselves. And should he have the courage of this conviction he must inevitably come to grief to the losing not only of his quarry but his ship."

"If the bottom is hard sand, it would be no great mishap for him to strike," said Ruderic. "He could lighten ship and warp off in a few hours' time when the tide shall have risen."

"Where I propose to lead him," said Horrocks, "there is about halfway across the bank, the Channel Rock, with a scant half-fathom over it, and I shall try so to maneuver that he bump his nose upon it. Failing this it is very doubtful if he be able to thread his way through any of the channels between the long narrow sand-bars, from northwest to southeast and where the width is in places scarcely more than a ship's length. In any case, whether he strike upon a coral reef or fetch up hard upon the sand, there must be a fine black mark against a vessel which decoys a government ship to her destruction. In this case I can show O'Conor that, having compromised himself beyond all explanation, he had best make what profit of the schooner that he is able, and in as short a time, and this accomplished, to break her up and sink her or clear out entirely for other seas."

"Do you think after this fright he will stick to his agreement?" Ruderic asked.

"I do not know, lad. It would suit me better if he were possessed of greater avarice and daring. O'Conor is right in his assertion that the days of piracy are numbered in these waters. Your real pirate, despite his acts of ruth, had to him something admirable. He was a predatory bandit of the sea who gave no quarter nor asked for any. He proclaimed himself for what he was, in port and out

of it, terrorizing towns and boldly running the Jolly Roger to his truck. He was like the Robber Baron of the Middle Ages who made open profession of his trade and challenged its suppression. But the Spanish Main still swarms with buccaneers and will continue to do so for many years to come."

"But is not the difference one of method, uncle?" Ruderic asked. "Have not most pirates once been buccaneers?"

"Aye, lad, but not most buccaneers, nor even small percentage of them, turned true pirate. They are a filthy crew of mongrel refugees and renegades whose occupation is the hunting of wild hogs and cattle which they slaughter and smoke or salt, or both, and peddle this refuse throughout the Antilles. But in certain places they foregather in great numbers to the matter of some hundreds, and given safe opportunity they turn their meat-scows and pirogues into marauding craft and their butcher knives to cutting the throats of the ill-armed merchant sailors. They are formidable only because of their treachery and numbers. In these very islands they have their secret strongholds, big camps well provisioned and rich in the goods plundered from their victims. Should they cut off a vessel which proves no dull sailor, they might mount guns upon her and go pirating for a cruise or two, but they are more apt to warp their prize up into some lagoon or creek and there strip her at their leisure.

"And have they any form of organization?" Ruderic asked.

"Such is but nominal. They pretend to a brotherhood and take an oath of fealty and fair dealing among themselves. They elect a chief but he may be deposed for lack of daring or, what is more important, lack of luck. They have their towns or villages with their women and children and slaves who may be black or white or yellow. They

are themselves of all colors and all nationalities, and their relative importance depends on him who proves himself the best hunter, butcher, and sea thief, and has most profited by these trades."

"Were you ever of them, uncle?" Ruderic asked.

"Yes, to my shame. After the betrayal of your father, and thinking your mother to be the victim of O'Conor, I entrusted you to the captain of the *Golden Prospect*, then half-crazed with grief and a thirst for vengeance I took some money that I had saved from your father's generosity and bought a small sloop, and went deliberately to join a pirate vessel which I knew to be revictualing up a river down the coast. My object was to obtain the means for making my revenge upon O'Conor my life's mission, and until this might find fulfillment I was quite ready to settle my score against the nation which had caused the disgraceful death and ruin of those so dear to me."

"Were you long with the pirates?" Ruderic asked.

"For five years there was no more ruthless freebooter. During the most of the time when England and the Colonies were at war, I warred on all humanity. And I achieved my purpose in that I eventually returned to the Old Country to undertake your rearing with no lack of money for that and the education I had planned for you."

His narrative was interrupted by the lookout aloft who, at this moment, reported breakers on the starboard bow.

Horrocks picked up his glass and sighted it. "That will be South Head," said he, "and directly on the rim of the Great Bahama Bank. Ten miles to the northward of it are the Cochinos Banks. Here are nothing but shoals with water from five fathoms to a foot or two. Now we shall see some sport. I must con the schooner from aloft and do you take the wheel and follow smartly my directions. With this fresh breeze on our quarter, and gaining

steadily in weight, we should be able to run across the Bank in five hours' time with our centerboard flush up, but it would not do to take too long a lead on our pursuer if we are to lure him on a reef. With the water roughed by the wind one cannot closely estimate its depth from the color, but if we keep well clear of the Cochinos Banks, there are few places where we are apt to strike until we reach the northern rim on the Tongue of the Ocean. Now let us see if I am good enough a pilot to find the Channel Rock, which is halfway across."

O'Conor, who had been below trying vainly to make his peace with Sheila, now came on deck on hearing through the skylights that breakers were in sight. Sheila followed him, her face still showing traces of its recent agitation in its unusual pallor and the dark shadows beneath her eyes.

"What is afoot?" O'Conor asked, for, although nominally the schooner's master, he scarcely occupied himself in such a function but left the sailing of her to Ruderic and the piloting to Horrocks.

"We had best shake this slow-plodding beagle off our trail, sir," Horrocks answered, "and to accomplish this the more quickly I purpose to run across the bank where, if he has the wisdom of a cockroach, he will not dare to follow."

O'Conor's ready wit was quick to see the danger of this course.

"But if he were to make the attempt and come to grief it would be another entry to our discredit in their black books," said he.

"What does it matter?" Horrocks answered. "They have no longer much doubt as to our roguish character. Were the breeze to drop we should most certainly be laid aboard to our ruin. The penalty for this fitting out a ship to carry slaves is forfeiture of the ship to the United States

with a fine of \$20,000, with an additional fine of from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Added to this by the act of 1800 is the punishment of imprisonment for two years, and I do not know what penalty might be imposed for refusing to heave to when so ordered by a government vessel."

O'Conor's face darkened. "This is a pretty coil that we have managed to get into," said he.

"Wherefore let us get out of it in the quickest manner possible," retorted Horrocks with a note of impatience in his heavy voice. "It is precisely for this purpose that the schooner was built, and you cannot deny but that she has served it well, and having served it her career is nearly at an end. But if you are the man of sense I take you for you will, before quitting her for good, make a final killing in a venture against the sea robbers which lurk here about. The days are passed when one might hope to make them disgorge a treasure of drouloon or plate or ingots of gold, but they still take heavy tithe of merchant vessels loaded with rich cargoes. I myself have seen, and not so many years ago, their warehouses crammed with such valuable commodities as the Vicuna wool, and jars of civet or ambergris and medicinal gums from Nicaragua and spices, such as cinnamon and cloves and ginger and pimento and vanilla beans and crates of marmalade and bales of Indian cloth, all articles of price and no great bulk. With some slight persuasion they might even be induced to render some packets of pearls from The Hatch, or bezoar stones from Patagonia, and even pieces of eight which they may have buried against a future period of famine."

O'Conor made a gesture of disapprobation. "We may talk of such wild schemes when safely out of our present embarrassment," said he, and then, perhaps from policy or perhaps because his trader's avarice was stirred at the prospect painted by Horrocks, he added, "such a cargo

as you describe would indeed be worth the carrying, let us say to France, but I much doubt you would find it so easy as you describe."

"One cannot find without the seeking," grumbled Horrocks, and thrusting his big telescope through his belt he strode to the fore shrouds and started slowly to hoist his great bulk aloft with some risk to the tarred ratlines. Reaching the crosstrees he raised himself between them and sent the lookout below, and a moment later called down to Ruderic to haul a little on the wind.

Hirondelle was rapidly increasing the distance by which she led her dogged pursuer, and Horrocks, fearing that if unable to profit by the pilotage of her quarry, the barkentine might give up the chase rather than risk striking on reef or shoal, ordered the foresail lowered, which measure might be explained to O'Conor as due to his desire for a quicker control of the schooner, whether to luff or pay her off.

The color of the water had changed from the deep indigo of depth to a greenish azure, as it shoaled, and had its surface been still, one might have seen the white sandy bottom with its ledges and patches of coral. But with a fresh breeze roughing its surface, with white-capped waves and the dazzling sunshine glancing from these to baffle the eye, one, while knowing himself to be among the shoals, was yet unable to gauge with any accuracy just what their depth might be. And it was here that the peculiar construction of the schooner served as a perfect decoy for her pursuer. For the commanding officer of the ten-gun barkentine argued with reason that his quarry, being of a tonnage almost equal to his own and well laden, to judge from her low freeboard, that where she could go he should be able to follow safely in her wake. He had remarked the length of *Hirondelle* and now from directly astern her could see that her beam was full and

that she sat low in the water, from which, no doubt, he argued a draught greater than that of his barkentine, and from the bold, unhesitating way in which the schooner had started to run across the Banks, like a fox over the thin ice of a spate frozen in a single night, the officer could have felt, no doubt, but that he had to deal with miscreants who were the parasites of those waters, and knew them as well as might his fleas know the back of a dog.

It would thus have seemed to him that he ran no unjustifiable risk in chasing *Hirondelle* across the shoals, provided always he could keep precisely in her wake, with no variation which might set him on a rock known to the schooner and that she might shave close in the hope that her pursuer blunder on it. And this determination to bowl along in the same groove was precisely what sinister old Horrocks had counted on and most desired. In that smooth, shallow water with the drop-keel up and the schooner light, though she looked to be laden by reason of her low side, he knew that she would float clear in four feet of water, and that a man aloft could plainly see any rock on which she might strike and be able to call down orders for avoiding it.

But the brave lieutenant in command of the barkentine, in ignorance of this light draught and the centerboard device, must then, in following *Hirondelle*, with his draught of eight to ten feet invariably strike, as Horrocks proposed to lead him across a rock pasture he remembered of old and which he counted on no difficulty in finding. This patch in question was for some acres fairly strewn with coral masses none of which were visible but had over them at mean low tide from two to five feet of water. This spot lay directly between the Channel Rock and Thunder Channel, through which Horrocks proposed to slip into the Tongue of the Ocean.

Two hours passed. Horrocks came down from aloft and

sent up Dirk to take his place. An hour later Dirk sang out to report what Horrocks, with some pardonable pride in his piloting, said could be no other than the Channel Rocks.

"They are halfway across the Bank," said he to Ruderick, "but too small and localized for my purpose. Fifteen miles farther north we should stumble on a perfect nest of them. And there our brave barkentine is very apt to remain. Her people are in no danger at all, as they have only to drop overside whaleboat and cutter and set up their rig and make for Andros, some seventy miles away. But it is these very same boats that would be our bane if the wind were suddenly to drop, and it is only on the off chance of this happening that he is holding on."

Some ten knots more were traversed when Horrocks called down Dirk from aloft and caused himself to be hoisted nearly to the hounds in what is known to sailors as a bo'sun's seat, the seat a piece of plank secured by a bowline in a bight. He bade Ruderick take the wheel, and the hands to stand by smartly to trim or slacken jib and forestaysail and mainsheets. The barkentine had shortened the distance between them to about a mile and was foaming along with a "bone in her teeth" and all taut and drawing. So confident and determined was her attitude that O'Conor thought he understood the reason for her dogged persistence.

"That fellow counts less on the dropping of the breeze than on another wisp of their broom at some point beyond," said he to Ruderick. "Since very obviously he cannot hope to catch us in a stern chase, his hunting tactics are those of the lurcher or beagle which seeks to keep the hare in motion and drive it into the maw of a faster dog ahead."

"But there is this difference, sir," said Ruderick, "that the beagle by this painstaking effort is always tiring the hare, so that its running may flag when put to a later

test. But there is no fatigue to be found in our schooner so long as the wind blows."

It was no part of Horrocks's plan that the barkentine should take the ground on the smooth sand. He had observed that the tide was about half-flood and rising, as could be seen from the drift of gulf-weed. Wherefore he called down an order to ease off a trifle more and ran down upon his trap with a backward glance at the barkentine. O'Conor, leaning over the rail and staring down into the translucent water, gave a gasp of dismay at sight of a serrated mass which seemed to leap at them from bottom. In the shadow of the schooner's lee he could plainly discern first a sudden change of color, from pale green to reddish broken gray, and then the uniformity of this and its uplifting. In that moment he would not have given a farthing for their chances of escape. He was convinced that Horrocks had blundered, and was driving the schooner on to the rocks, and he instinctively braced himself to meet the shock.

So also, perhaps, did Horrocks from his elevation, which must have seemed to bring the barrier still closer to the vessel's keel. It may possibly have occurred to him that the minute builders of such reefs are never idle, and that their work goes ever on and on through the ages to the forming of islands which in time in their accumulation of driftwood and other flotsam, becomes first awash, then dry of surface when the implanting of a seed in the guano of some bird of passage makes of this islet the nucleus of an isle with a vegetation growing in the course of time.

- But if he thought that he had erred he gave no sign of it, knowing well that there was no time for the altering of a course, once over the rocks. They held on everything, and a moment later, with such scant margin as none could guess, *Hirondelle* had flitted past the danger and was squatting across the sandy shallows.

O'Conor sprang back from the rail with an oath which was echoed from the forecastle by Dirk.

"God's bones!" he cried, and gave a great roar of laughter. "Now watch the Yankee pile up out of water."

O'Conor seized Ruderick by the elbow. "Signal him to keep off. We cannot afford this added offense."

Ruderick glanced astern. "He would laugh at any such caution, sir," he answered. "The hare you mentioned might as well signal the lurcher that it was about to dive into a bramble patch where it would be unwise to follow."

The water deepened as could be seen from its color and, the danger now passed, all eyes turned to watch the fate of the barkentine, which stood on stoutly in their wake. She neared the ledge and for a brief instant appeared to realize her danger, for she wore off sharply in an effort to jibe out of the trap. Then her bows were seen to mount like the forequarters of a steeplechaser breasting a hedge. Up she came with a sudden gleam of copper under her forefoot. Coming to a halt she swung slightly, then listed to port, high upon the rocks, and so pivoting with no stability.

"She has it," roared Dirk, and a yell of exultation went up from the crew to whom all men of war were natural enemies. "Her bottom is stove like the butt of a rum firkin, that each brave lad may help himself."

Chapter XVIII

O'CONOR, white with anger at what had happened, called Horrocks to account for it.

"There is no use to mince the matter," snarled O'Conor, furiously. "To gain your end in this mad project of piracy you have sought to force my hand beyond all hope of excuse or explanation."

Master Horrocks stood before him with folded arms, and his craggy features wore an air of mock apology.

"You do me wrong, sir," he protested, in his rumbling voice. "It is twenty years since last I paid this place a visit. I mind there were some patches of coral rock out here in the middle, but I had not counted on the activity of these minute builders. How could I know that in that time their industry could mount a barrier on which, for some seconds, I thought we must surely strike?"

"That is vain talk, as none knows better than yourself," snapped O'Conor. "As *savant* of marine zoology you are my master, but you cannot persuade me that the coral polyps accomplish any such labor in so short a lapse of time. The truth of the matter is simply this, that you and Ruderic are so set upon the carrying out of your mad designs that you do not care by what means, fair or foul, you coerce me into the aiding and abetting of them."

"I cannot honestly deny the truth of such a charge," admitted Horrocks, and added, coolly, "but your Honor must concede us a certain frankness in our method."

"Troth, but there is no disputing that!" cried O'Conor, with a short, bitter laugh. "In administering your dose you have not bothered much about its pleasing taste.

But I am beginning to awaken, and shall now meet your frankness with an equal candor. I perceive that the two of you are highly intelligent and highly dangerous men; you, Master Horrocks, from your learned sophistries, and Ruderic as your disciple and advocate of them. I acknowledge freely the profit which has accrued me from our association, and you have but to lay claim to what you feel to be your share of it that this be duly honored. In a word, I desire urgently to discharge in full my obligation to you both . . . and then be rid of you."

Horrocks slightly bowed his craggy head. "That expresses with precision the desires of my nephew nad myself, sir," he answered.

"Then what is your claim?" O'Conor demanded. "How much do you want, in the name of all the Saints?"

"The Saints have naught to do with this agreement of ours," Horrocks answered, "so let us leave them out of it. Ruderic and I ask only the fulfillment of your promise given first at O'Conor Castle, and with as one might say a lanyard to it, but later confirmed here at your plantation house."

"That I turn the schooner into a *chasse-boucanier*?" O'Conor demanded.

"That you turn her into a chase-anything-you-please, sir, so long as it is not the chase of a merchandise disgraceful to those of us engaged in the trade thereof. You must, in all fairness, admit that Ruderic and I have held to our agreement, no matter how distasteful? But now that you have your full quota of blacks we would hold you to your promise that the schooner be employed for the purpose stipulated."

O'Conor reflected for an instant. "Good," said he, "then here is what I offer you. At the end of this voyage, as soon as ever we can put ashore the blacks and my few personal effects, I shall present you with the schooner . . .

or rather I shall sell her to you for one shilling and other valuable considerations, which same are your past offices. And that there be no mistake as to the ownership, this sale shall be duly recorded by the customs clerk at Port Royal. You and your nephew may then take the vessel and her precious crew, of whom all have the air of longing to cut a throat again, and you can make such use of her as pleases you, I care not what, so long as I am not mixed up with it."

"Now there is a fair and generous offer," said Horrocks, and turned away his face that O'Conor might not read the bitter rage and disappointment that it might betray. For such a slipping from the snare he had been so long and at such pains to spread about O'Conor was precisely what Horrocks had most feared. Yet, in all justice, O'Conor could not be accused of bad faith, considering the cost of *Hirondelle's* construction and the fact that he had enjoyed the service of her for less than a year. And more than this, she was the one vessel *par excellence* for such a use as that in which Horrocks was so eager to engage her.

The grizzled "avenger of the blood" now realized that he had overplayed his hand in luring the barkentine to her destruction. There was no danger to any of her crew, as she had her boats and stores with the island of Andros at no great distance. But the act had given the schooner so black a mark that O'Conor no longer dared keep her in his possession, let alone his voyaging any more aboard her, and if taxed later with what had happened he could throw the blame of it upon his pilot.

Even then he might be punished, but this was not the punishment which Horrocks had in store for him. This was no question of fine or other penalty, even to imprisonment. He had plotted so to compromise the man that with some future overt act he might live to see him con-

victed of piracy and hanged for it, as he had himself contrived to send Horrocks's beloved master, Ruderick's father, to the scaffold that he might gain possession of his rich estate, and of his wife. Horrocks had, as he had said to Ruderick, counted on more avarice and greater daring in the man.

He now realized bitterly that these hopes might have been fulfilled but for the enormous profit O'Conor had made of the schooner in so short a time, so that he no longer found himself under any great necessity to run a risk. The crew also, though inclined to grumble at the tameness of their service, had shared richly by it and on the whole esteemed O'Conor as a shrewd and lucky trader, and a liberal master. Their motto was the classic one of the buccaneers, and later of the merchant sailor: "Drunk and full or dry and empty, to hell with bloody misers!" And O'Conor had proved himself to be no miser.

So that seeing him now purposing to slip through the net which he had so subtly spread about him while yet leaving room for no accusation of bad faith, Horrocks found himself in the grip of a very desperation of hatred. For the moment he was seized by the mad impulse to call upon Ruderick and the crew to back him in seizing the schooner and running up the Jolly Roger to the truck, then impeaching O'Conor with his treachery of nearly the quarter of a century ago and running him up also to the crosstrees in a hempen cravat.

But his reason told him instantly that such an effort would be doubtful of successful issue. O'Conor would deny his charges, and, being held in no hatred by the men, such accusation would not be used as pretext for their act. Moreover, he would repeat the offer just made to Horrocks that they had only to land him and his belongings when they might take the vessel and make such use of her as they desired. But more than this, so crude a vengeance

fell far short of Horrocks's fanatical purpose. He was determined to mete out to O'Conor no less than the tragic fate that his machinations had brought upon an innocent man, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," according to authority of Holy Writ. Horrocks knew that he could not be content with less than to see him disgraced and impoverished and subject to days of mental anguish, far worse than any physical, before paying the supreme penalty. He wished to have pronounced upon him the withering sentence "that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead, and may God have mercy on your sinful soul!" And even greater anguish than this, the man must know that his beloved daughter was helpless in the hands of his mortal enemy, and that she might expect to share the fate which he had inflicted on Ruderic's mother.

Wherefore Horrocks, after his momentary stab of disappointment and temptation got himself in hand enough to mutter thickly: "There can be no question of your lordship's liberality, and I am not ungrateful for the offer. But there are insurmountable objections to our acceptance of it. For one thing, this crew would not enlist for such a venture unless it were commanded by yourself. They hate my nephew and me, and not without some reason, while they respect and esteem your lordship, and what is more they count on your influence and protection in a pinch. These days are the twilight of freebooting in these waters, and I do not know where we could get a proper crew for such endeavor. And . . ." he looked O'Conor straightly in the eyes, "when all is said and done you must admit that generous as is your offer, it does not fulfill the obligation of your word passed to us, that you would lend yourself personally to such enterprise, once the present needs of the plantation were supplied."

O'Conor smote the rail with his open hand. 'Now

hang you for an obstinate and unreasonable old pirate, Master Horrocks!" he barked, "and hanged you certainly will be, and Ruderic also if you both persist in such stupid and sanguinary methods. I tell you, man, that piracy of all degree is a traffic of the past. These waters are no longer wide enough to float freebooters. With such a schooner as this you might succeed for a brief period, but you would be surely destined to a shameful end; just such an end as my neighbor suffered even in the confusion and ill-organized efforts at the enforcement of law and order of a quarter of a century ago."

Horrocks's craggy face turned livid while twin flames burned in his cavernous eyes.

"Then I am to believe that you refuse to keep your pact with us?" he asked.

O'Conor threw his hands above his head with a Gallic gesture of despair. "Damme, then, you are, sir!" he snarled. "After what has just happened I refuse to be drawn deeper into the bog. You may have the vessel if you like, or I shall scuttle or burn her. I shall make an end of it, and such maddening persecution! I repudiate my agreement, my word if you will, in the face of common sense. Call me what you like, I am still possessed of sanity of mind, which is more than can be said of your sullen nephew and yourself!"

And having thus delivered his ultimatum he made for the companionway and went below, as one sorely tried and hectored and seeking sanctuary of his quarters.

Chapter XIX

CONTRARY to Horrocks's expectation the fair breeze lasted the night through but dropped about an hour before the dawn to find *Hirondelle* some twenty miles to the northward of New Providence. Then, just as the day before, the breeze sprang up with the sun, light and baffling at first and brushing the sheen of the water as one might stroke against the nap of glistening blue satin here and there.

After the fashion of the tropics, the day leaped quickly into being with brief preliminaries of its dawning, when the wind, like an honest toiler roused to do the daily stint, came up brisk and steady to fill the tall sails of the schooner and set her on her northward course.

Ruderic, relieved by Horrocks, who took the morning watch, came on deck at eight bells, when they were gliding blithely along, the only tenant so far as eye could see in the blue plain of water. Horrocks then went down to his breakfast and afterward to his repose of which it seemed to Ruderic he had need, if one were to judge from the expression on a face more deeply lined than was habitual, and haggard from the emotions of baffled vengeance and disappointment. He had found occasion to tell Ruderic of O'Conor's ultimatum and the repudiation of his promise, and the older man was disturbed at the thoughtful quiet with which his news had been received.

"I cannot say I am surprised," was Ruderic's comment, "and, when all is said and done, he would be a fool to stick to his agreement, the more so as we know him to be a man of no principle of honor. We shall have to bide

our time, uncle, but something seems to tell me that this will surely come."

"It may for you, lad," answered Horrocks, heavily, "but I fear that such reward is not for me. I had hoped that coming again to a warmer clime would rebuild my strength and feed it with fresh promise. But, on the contrary, I must acknowledge to a steady failing of breath and action of the heart and even at times of life desire. There is a fever in my bones and in my brain, and this torrid, humid air of the Gulf Stream seems at times to stifle me so that I must fight not only for my vigor but for a clearness of thought which becomes at moments jangled and confused. If I fail before the hour strikes, then it will be for you to keep our faith and accomplish our life purpose, no matter at what cost;" he had glanced at Sheila, reclining in a Carib hammock swung from a davit to the corner of the cabin house, and repeated somberly, "no matter at what cost."

But on this exquisite morning Ruderic found it difficult to dwell darkly on thoughts of vengeance. Though in no way altering the sinister decision implanted in the very soul of his nature at a tender age and daily, almost hourly, cultivated by such philosophies and reminiscences as were bound to color every plane and angle of Ruderic's budding thought, the power of the suggestions had seemed lately to wane just as their suggestor was himself fading in health and mental tone. Ruderic might be likened to a young potted plant by nature of white stainless blossoms which, through daily sprinkling of its soil with a crimson dye, absorbs this through its roots and carries it upward in the sap of its stalk to diffuse in the snowy petals lurid, sanguinary hues. Then, let this dye be gradually diluted and the blossom, true to type, slowly strives to regain its purity of tone until the alien hue entirely removed, it again resumes the white purity for which the hand of God designed it.

So now Ruderic's unholy purpose had become one which had its tentacles embedded like some foul devil-fish lurking in the clear pools behind a coral reef rather in the mind than in the heart. What had previously been an office thirstily craved by his deepest desires was now become more in the nature of a disagreeable duty, a sacred covenant, but of a fulfillment on which he no longer cared to dwell. Just as some fanatical young nihilist, perverted by the false doctrines of a mistaken, though astute mind, might persuade himself of the obligation to destroy a tyrant whom he has never seen, so did Ruderic accept the obligation laid upon him, and told himself that such action must be just and right.

He had conceived no liking for O'Conor in their close association, while at the same time he found it difficult to hate the man as his sense of duty told him that he ought. But he could not cast his eyes on Sheila without the rush of impulses as bewildering as they were powerful. These were apt to come at any moment of the day or night, but more intensely when Sheila's voice or movements made her near presence acutely felt. They interrupted Ruderic's physical activities when engaged on deck, mocked at the concentration of his mind as in the pursuit of his studies of astronomy and navigation he worked intently and laboriously at some long calculation to ascertain the ship's position. He might be actually asleep and in the land of dreams whence the young and hearty sailor is not easily aroused. But in any of these aforesaid conditions, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually engaged (assuming that dreams are spiritual flights), let there come from deck or cabin the low-pitched lilt of Sheila's laugh or the blue-black flash of her inky hair or, from the other side of the bulkhead, the rustle of her body as in the humid heat she turned upon her Carib sleeping mat of fragrant woven grasses, and Ruderic's heart

would seem suddenly to rise with much the same sensation of the lifting deck the first day out, and it would race off with the muffled hammering of a caulkers mallet against the ribs of a ship.

And the worst of it was that with so aggravated symptoms of his disorder, Ruderic could not have diagnosed it to save his soul. At first he tried to tell himself that it was hatred or such an animosity as might send shivers through a badger dog at sight of the quarry it was to bait and throttle in its cage.

But this did not suffice. So Ruderic told himself that it must be a sort of pusillanimous dread at thought of executing sentence on the unsuspecting girl when the time should come to stab her doubly with information of her father's perfidy and the news that she was to know herself henceforward as a slave to serve his will and do his bidding.

Ruderic had long since put from his mind her supreme degradation, for here was something which his nature, harsh but cleanly, could not support. Such, he argued was an act which could only find incentive in a vile nature or perhaps in a purely animal one not innately vile but itself the slave of animal impulse. It would be enough to break her spirit by bending it to and fro in compulsory humiliating service.

But even the prospect of this sent through him a shudder of repulsion. His mind was unable to picture Sheila trembling at his orders, paling at his approach, slovenly of person, with pale pinched face and bowed head, ill-clad as a menial. His thought refused to dwell on such a vision of her.

Then why, he asked himself impatiently, should he grow hot and cold at a glimpse of her swaying, supple figure as it came through the hatch or moved about the deck, or the distant murmur of her voice or even the mere thought of her that might rush in suddenly to obtrude

upon his dreams or waking occupation. Since it were not love nor desire nor antipathy nor compassion, what then could it be? He left the riddle to be solved by future events and in the meantime presented to her the same attitude of cold courtesy which had been his part of their relations from the beginning of the voyage.

But there had been a rude rupture of this when he had carried her below in obedience to O'Conor's orders. It was the second time that Ruderic had held her pliant body in the clasp of his strong arms, though in the struggle with the cayman he had been conscious of nothing but solicitude and throbbing horror at the narrowness of the escape.

But in carrying her to the cabin she had struggled impotently against his strength, and her vigorous but futile resistance had aroused in him a sort of savage exultation in his mastery, with the satisfying of a famished impulse to hold her in his arms.

Ruderic told himself that such was the impulse of the dog to close its jaws on the sleek struggling body of an otter, but this assurance did not ring true.

And now on this vivid morning, with the sea a vast blue meadow of smiling peace which it would seem should by rights be given over to the gambols of nereids and tritons or the gentle gliding of some love barge toward the islands of desire, Ruderic found it impossible to dwell upon or cherish thoughts of hatred or revenge. Lanty, coming presently on deck to fetch his coffee and a doughboy, this last a sort of floury mass twisted in the shape of a half hitch and fried in fat, sustaining to such strong stomachs as might digest it, the "Natural" with his sensitive perception, looked into Ruderic's face and laughed.

"I wish ye good morning, Master Ruderic," said he, "and I will be rejoicin' that the cobwebs are brushed away

and the poisonous spider that wove them chased into its hole."

Ruderic was a little startled at this accurate interpretation of his mood. He was conscious, though unadmittedly, of a tremendous relief at the decision of O'Conor and the indefinite postponement (as he foolishly hoped) of the black day of reckoning.

"A good day to you, Lanty," said he, biting into the doughboy, or dough-knot, as the sailors called the solid dainty. "Who would not sell a farm and go to sea if it were always like this?"

"And why should not it be so always, sir?" queried Lanty, "sure the fine weather is in the heart more than on the sea, nor do the wind and waves greatly matter if the soul is at peace."

"Perhaps you are right, Lanty," Ruderic admitted, "but the trouble is that with the devil walking always up and down, we can never be sure how long the calm will last."

"Sure there is small ill the Ould Man can do if we keep him walking up and down, sir, and do not bid him enter to toast his hairy shins. We have but to bar the door with love to keep him out. But let there be a drop of hatred and he will enter to claim what is his due. Lave me tell you, sir, the devil grows in hatred like mushrooms in manure."

"Hatred is a part of our heritage, Lanty, and not so easily cast out."

"Wirrah! that is true, sir, more's the pity. It is 'asier to give up love than hate, for love is a debt to God, and hate one to the devil, and the latter by far the more insistent creditor and always on the threshold with his mortgage in hand. But a man of clean soul may always borrow from the treasury of God."

"The worst of it is, Lanty," said Ruderic, "that so

few of us are able to boast the clean soul which makes such credit possible."

"Then 'tis your honor, himself, can do so," retorted Lanty, quickly. "Hard your heart may be but it is clean and can no more be blackened than ye could tar a lump of ice."

"And why should you think it so hard?" Ruderic asked.

"'Tis hard of your own fault because ye will not let love enter there. Were once you to become a lover it would soften and ripen and sweeten like a pear in the sunshine."

"But are there not hard-hearted lovers?" Ruderic asked, for he was in the rare mood to be amused.

"Faith and there are two sorts of lovers, sir," said Lanty, "the true and the false. The true lover is him who thinks only of his swatheart's happiness, and the false one him who thinks only of his own."

"A poor sort of lover, this last," Ruderic agreed. "In fact, I should say that he was scarcely such at all."

"He may start as such, sir," said Lanty, "and be transformed into the other, by the hand of God, just as the prickly stingin' grub is changed into the lovely butterfly;" and he broke into one of his little songs.

Then catching sight of the poultry that roamed at will in the schooner's waist, picking up the grains of rice and corn spilled from the breakfast of the blacks, Lanty stooped and raised the tails of his long coat, and flapped them and gave a challenging crow in such perfect mimicry that the hens looked up with interest from their pecking and the defiance was answered by a cock of Spanish fighting strain, which hopped upon a cask of water and sent back its ringing invitation to a duel a *l'outrance*. Lanty sidled down upon the deck and crowed again, then hopped high in air with a flourish of his spindling legs. The gamecock, astonished but not dismayed by the

superior size of his grotesque rival, walked up daintily before him, lowered his head shorn of comb and wattles, ruffled the plumage of his neck, then sprang high in air and struck out viciously with his long curved spurs. Lanty parried the stroke with his blue coat tail, then made a pass in return. And thus the comic warfare continued for several minutes amid roars of laughter from the blacks and the watch on deck surveying it from the forecastle head. Then Lanty, as though smitten with sudden fear, let fall his coat tails and ran vanquished and pursued by his irate antagonist in and out among the blacks who rolled on the planking in paroxysms of delight.

Ruderic, also laughing despite himself, heard a rustle behind him as he looked down from the quarter-deck and turned to see Sheila at his elbow, and again there rushed through him that sensation as though borne aloft in a great swing. Sheila was fresh and lovely as some gorgeous sea anemone seen through translucent depths and swaying on its stalk in an eddy of the current. Her eyes were of the purple blue of the clear indigo water in the shadow of the schooner and her lips like red coral left by the tide on the snowy beach of a tropic isle. Pearls were set between these coral twigs and they were now all revealed at Lanty's antics, and as she leaned over the rail at Ruderic's side to watch them better, some force which was irresistible drew his eyes from her exquisite profile with its delicate little *retrossé* Irish nose to her round, white throat, and the swell of it where it emerged from the low-cut linen sailor blouse.

"If all of us could share a little of Lanty's light-hearted folly, how much happier the world would be," Sheila murmured.

"Perhaps it was not ordered that we be so carefree," Ruderic answered. "I sometimes think that happiness was not included in our human scheme of things."

"You think nothing of the sort, Ruderic," Sheila contradicted. "You do but reflect Master Horrocks's saturnine and gloomy theories. I doubt if you, yourself, have ever given any thought at all to subjects of such sort."

"I have had scant time for abstract theorizing," Ruderic answered, and would have moved away. But Sheila laid her hand upon his arm.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Stay and talk to me and tell me that after all the world is not the dreary place you feel you ought to think it. Surely you must sometimes feel the *joie de vivre*, and a longing for the happiness which must be found where there is so much of beauty."

She swayed toward him and laid her hand on his where it rested on the rail as she looked eagerly into his eyes. Fine tremors ran through Ruderic. He turned his head away. Sheila gave her low, thrilling laugh.

"Now, Ruderic," said she, "I am going to tell you something that you may not know."

Ruderic drew himself together with an effort. "There are a great many things I do not know, my lady," said he, coldly.

"Well then," said Sheila, "this is the most important of them. You no longer hate my father, whether for his ill-treatment of Master Benton and his daughter or from any other cause which I cannot guess. And you no longer hate my poor self. You try to, but you fail. Hatred is like love in this one respect, Ruderic; that it may acknowledge the authority of the mind, but cannot be compelled to obey it. We love because we love, and if we must hate, why then it is because we cannot help it."

"Then would you try to persuade me that having ceased to hate you I now love you?" Ruderic asked.

Sheila threw her head back and gave a little laugh that was altogether lacking in mirth. "Dear me, no!" she cried. "You leap now to the other extreme, which is to

be expected, as your nature is one of extremes. There can be no question but that you love your Mistress May, and very truly, else you could scarcely have so long resisted my own insidious wiles. I do but claim that you have ceased to hate me."

"Then you admit that marks of favor you have seen fit from time to time to show me were no more than wiles?" asked Ruderic.

"Faith, I suppose I might as well," said Sheila, with a little shrug. "Plantation life and that aboard a slave-ship is not so fraught with pleasant enlivenment that one can afford to neglect the amusement offered by the oldest sport in this wicked world of ours, which is the *chasse à l'homme* . . . the man hunt, if you will. Besides, I do not wish to lose entirely my former skill in such pursuits."

Now a man with more experience of women than Ruderic, which is almost to say a man with any experience at all of them, would have read in this speech no more than the half-hearted effort to save the face. But Ruderic, from his very lack of such knowledge, took it literally and as the truth, and his face showed a sort of grim triumph at hearing what he took to be a confession of precisely that which he had told himself must be the reason of Sheila's gentleness in his regard.

"I hope," said Ruderic, with cold politeness, "that your ladyship has profited by the pastime as much as I have enjoyed the art with which you practiced it."

"Oh dear," cried Sheila, already repenting her speech, "you seem to set a trap for me at every turn, just as you and your terrible uncle have been laying your snares to catch my father in a *collet*. Now, Ruderic, how can you blame me if. . . ."

But just what she might have said may never be known, for at the moment the masthead lookout, perched like an eagle above their heads, bawled lustily: "Sail-O. . . !"

Chapter XX

RUDERIC, glad of the interruption to a duel of speech in which he had a vantage that he could not hope to hold, sprang for the main rigging and whipped up it like a sakawinkie. Halfway to the hounds, he turned to scan the sky line ahead.

For an instant it appeared to be unmarred. Then, as his eyes became adjusted to a longer focus, he discovered that which not only puzzled him but aroused an interest so intense that his vision had watered before he could well examine what he saw. He looked up to see Dirk perched some thirty feet above him, though such detail was not within a bosun's duties.

"Have you had a good nap up there in the belfry, you half-lined abbey-lubber?" queried Ruderic. "If you roost there for your health, then you had better throw a rope's end round your paunch and the topmast shroud, but if you are up to see what may be adrift, then why not report in time to save us a collision?"

"Easy does it, marster," answered Dirk. "The bloomin' 'aze 'as just this moment lifted."

"You were born a liar and a thief," said Ruderic, "and such you will of course remain." He winked his eyes and looked again. "Do you see a sail there ahead, or two of them?"

"Please you, Marster Rud'ric, now that I look again, there are three, or may I roast in hell."

"There is no doubt of that," said Ruderic, and discovered the third which Dirk reported. "If your glims

were not half souzed from rum and playing seven-and-eleven, you must have sighted them at sunrise."

"I saw sum'mat but poorly, and feared to be mistook," said Dirk in lame excuse. "But now that the brume clears, I make out a little ship hove to, and a pair o' smaller vessels starndin' by 'er."

"And what do you make them out, swiveled-eyed son of a corby crow?" demanded Ruderic, impatiently. "You clamber up because you boast a pair of sea-eyes, when any babber-lipped black in the waist must have sighted them the sooner."

Dirk, unmoved by these salty compliments, stared intently ahead, and Ruderic, calling to the quartermaster to fetch him the big telescope, steadied this against the rigging and sighted on the vessels ahead. They were still hull-down over the horizon, but from their size and rigs and relative positions and the bad repute of the Bahama Islands scattered all about, Ruderic leaped to an immediate conclusion. And no sooner had he done so than this was voiced from overhead by Dirk.

"God's bones, sir," he roared. "Yonder do be a pair of buccaneers a-cuttin' orf a little merchant vessel. One is a ketch and t'other a big jack-boat."

"There is also a big pirogue well this side of them and making in their direction under oars," said Ruderic, and ordered that O'Conor and Horrocks be called. The situation now seemed to him most clear. Sunset of the previous day had found the defenseless trader drifting along, and she had been sighted from some neighboring cay by buccaneers who had a stronghold there. No doubt they kept a constant lookout for such prey. They had put off under cover of the darkness and fallen upon their victim at dawn, and having now plundered her and slain her people they had doubtless bored her bottom with an auger and were waiting only for the morning breeze to get away.

Such also was the opinion of Horrocks when he came on deck, and O'Conor did not question it. Just as on the day before, the breeze was springing up astern and freshening steadily, so that it would reach the vessels becalmed ahead not so long before *Hirondelle* herself, for even a clumsy vessel and dull sailer will bring down a following breeze when first it begins to blow.

And then, to confirm the suspicions shared by all, they were evidently sighted by the marauders, for the pirogue was seen to hoist a sail, and veering sharply to starboard, began to creep away under power of her oars. Her two larger confederates, remained still inert and doubtless hoping that the draught of air would reach them in time for them still to make their escape. But *Hirondelle*, with her drop-keel hauled up flush, was now slipping through the water with increasing speed.

Horrocks laid down his glass and looked at O'Conor with a glitter in his eyes and a faint flush on his sunken cheeks.

"Now here is just what I had hoped for, sir," said he. "A brace of scurvy buccaneers who have abandoned their flaying and smoking of hogs and cattle long enough to have a go at bigger game. They have cut her off at daylight and doubtless massacred her people and transhipped her cargo aboard their smaller boat. The pirogue is even now making for some lagoon amid the cays where, no doubt, they have their settlement, and having oars, may win her way to safety. But with our speed and this leading breeze we can strike the others before they get far from where they now lie becalmed."

O'Conor frowned and shook his head. "I have already told you that I will have no more to do with lawless conduct," said he. "I am already too deeply involved in such."

"But stop and think, sir," answered Horrocks. "Here

would be no lawless conduct, but, on the contrary, an action which might go far to atone for such. It is a deed of merit to mop up these vermin where found, and by their very presence here you may always swear that you misdoubted the character of the barkentine of yesterday through having been informed that buccaneers had their lair hereabouts. To fall in with them now and wipe them off the waters would affirm such statement, and as for the cargo they have plundered, we may load it aboard the schooner and make restitution of it."

O'Conor's expression showed that he was quick to appreciate the soundness of this suggestion. But his face remained clouded, and again he shook his head.

"Not with my daughter aboard," said he. "I should do wrong to expose her to the risk of gunfire."

"The danger would be but slight, sir," Horrocks asserted. "Our own guns, though few, are of the best, and we could outrange them and compel them to surrender. Or if it came to laying them aboard, with such a fighting crew of scalawags as we have here, this scurvy pack would be like a pitful of rats on which one looses the terriers. It is not likely they have any ordnance of value, for their method is always to board and fight it out with knife and pistol. Upon my word, sir, when, in token of past experience, I tell you most emphatically that here is not a chance you can afford to miss."

O'Conor's harrowed face showed reluctance, but also indecision. He could not help but feel that there was sound reason in Horrocks's advice, and that it would be a strong claim to honesty of purpose were he to sail into port (after first having landed his slaves) with a handful of buccaneers in irons to be delivered up for justice and a rich cargo torn from their bloody hands. Such a circumstance would go far toward the allaying of any past suspicion as to his dealings, and for having led the barken-

tine upon the reef. Then as he was standing, harassed and undecided, Sheila, who had listened quietly to what was being said, slipped up to him and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Master Horrocks is right, father," said she, and her eyes glowed up into his face, her own pale but unafraid. "It is our plain duty to suppress an act of piracy like this which happens in our very path. To pass it by would not be the act of brave and honest folk."

"I fear for your safety, sweetheart," said O'Conor.

"Then you need not," said Sheila. "As Master Horrocks says, the danger is but slight. Whatever else this wild crew of ours may be, or whatever their past, there is no doubt but that they are trained sea-fighters who know their work. I shall go below and keep out of danger of stray pistol or musket shots."

O'Conor looked at Ruderick. "What is your advice?" he asked, "though, of course, you will side with your uncle."

"Of course, sir," said Ruderick, coolly. "I do not see how we have any other choice. One can scarcely watch an honest ship stripped before one's eyes and her people slaughtered."

"There is also another consideration," said Horrocks. "Her people may not all have been destroyed, and, were we to rescue some of them, they would give testimony of our worthy act."

O'Conor considered for a moment. "Very well," said he, reluctantly, "then carry on."

Horrocks turned to Dirk who had come down from aloft and was straining his ears to hear the decision, like a wolf-hound held on its leash with the quarry in view.

"Clear ship for action," boomed Horrocks, when Dirk, with a hoarse oath of satisfaction, raised his silver pipe to his lips and blew a shrill and piercing note. "Clear

ship for action," he bellowed. "Look alive now. Snake down the for'ard rigging and lay by shot-stoppers and watch-tackles. One hand to fetch up ammunition."

It was as though *Hirondelle*, drifting rapidly across the placid waters, had been struck by a sudden squall. The hands, with a frenzied yell of delight, sprang to their several tasks of preparation. The wondering blacks were shackled and sent below. Sailors, running aloft with coils of heavy ratline stuff, seized it diagonally from shroud to shroud while preventer-stays were deftly rigged against the cutting of rigging by solid shot. Light watch-tackles to seize and stop the ends of parted shrouds were laid conveniently at hand. The tarpaulin covers were snatched from the guns and the tampions from their muzzles. Cutlasses and pistols were served out, and loaded muskets laid on deck against the bulwarks. Buckets were filled for sponging, while a small supply of ammunition was placed at hand in the shelter of sand bags.

As *Hirondelle* was to be the aggressor, no boarding nettings were rigged—but the longboat was dropped over-side and towed at the end of a sea painter. And last of all, when all was ready for the attack, the flag which Congress had ordained in 1795, that of fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, was run to the main peak, when a hand swarmed out with palm and needle and stitched it to the leach rope.

Meanwhile the breeze had freshened steadily and *Hirondelle*, ever quick to profit by it, was coursing over a sea smooth as to swell, but now with dancing wavelets which gave it a deep and vivid blue. The schooner was rapidly running down on the three vessels that by now the draught had reached, though lightly, so that their positions were not as yet much altered. The pirogue, under sail as well as oars, had made considerable progress in the direction of a faint blue line set low on the horizon.

It could then be seen even with the naked eye that the victim of the buccaneers was slowly sinking. She was a bark-rigged vessel of about three hundred tons, and now abandoned, with her canvas alternately filling and flapping, she seemed to be turning slowly, as though bewildered and in despair of finding some avenue of escape from her impending doom.

The ketch and what Dirk had taken to be a jack boat with spritsail rig, like a wherry or barge, but which proved actually to be a small schooner, had drawn in upon each other as though for mutual defense, and Horrocks, studying these closely through his glass, laid it presently aside and looked at O'Conor with a glow of satisfaction in his cavernous eyes.

"They are deep-laden with their plunder," said he, "and will not give it up without a fight. But I do not think they will prove any great problem."

"Can we not sink one with our guns and then attack the other?" asked O'Conor.

"Why send good cargo to the bottom?" asked Horrocks, coolly. "With our greater speed and ease of handling, we can slip alongside or between them if they draw into favorable position, and sweep their decks with grape, then board and finish up the job according to each man his fancy. Look at these fellows of ours! Up to this time I have liked them little, but at this moment I vow that their demeanor is greatly to my taste. Lanty!"—he thrust his great head over the hatch—"oh, Lanty! Do you serve the hands a round of grog."

But there was no reply from Lanty. The poor natural, with nerves so highly sensitized that he withered at a harsh word or curse, had crept off into some nook or cranny where, with smothered sobs and ears stopped, he waited the issue in a paroxysm of dread, this less for the outcome than a horror of the crash of conflict. Like a

dog in a thunderstorm, which creeps into a recess of the cellar, Lanty was in the throes of an anguish over which he had no control. But there was this difference, that no storm of natural elements or any other convulsion of nature had any power to frighten Lanty, nor would it have disturbed his equilibrium to have met a tiger face to face. For it was only the violent passions of men, their strife and hatred, that struck dread through his gentle soul, nor did these passions have to be directed toward himself to do so.

So Dirk, swaggering and jubilant, and leaving in his wake a stream of lurid curses, was assigned the office of serving liquid courage to the men, although of this there seemed scant need, to judge from their look and conduct. Stripped to the waist, their breeches held by sash or belt through which were thrust pistol or cutlass or deadly knives, their corded muscles swelling and rippling like serpents beneath the surface of a pool, their skins, swarthy or white, charted with scars of former conflicts, heads tightly bound in flaming kerchiefs under which their fierce eyes gleamed, it seemed to Ruderic that the sight of them alone should be enough to numb with terror the enemy on whom they were to fall.

Sheila had gone below at her father's order, that she might not be offended by the horrid oaths and sanguinary japes and jokes that were bandied from mouth to mouth. It was not a youthful crew, nor were there any apprentice lads among them. All were men of ripened age whose battles had been fought a score of years ago, twoscore in the cases of some of the grizzled lot. And although many, no doubt, had served their shift of buccaneering, they were in general pirates pure and simple, the corsair crews of vessels cruising openly under the Jolly Roger, or the Death's Head with its square black field and white

skull and crossbones, lean, ferocious sea-wolves whose oath it was to ask no quarter and to give none.

"Bones and body!" cried Dirk, exultantly. "Now 'ere is proper sport, my gentlemen, and such as a man may lend 'is 'and and 'eart to. I for one 'ave 'ad my fill of calking off and playing abel-whackets and the tame running of black slaves. What say you, sirs, that, when this little trick is turned and the blacks safely landed, we run down to Barataria and try a fall with Captain Jean Lafitte?"

"One thing at a time, my lad," rumbled Horrocks. "Do you serve your gun and lead the boarders, should we see fit to lay one of these butchers alongside. Ruderic, you had best take the wheel, enduring the encounter."

But Ruderic protested hotly. "You can handle the schooner better than I, uncle," said he, "and know better the strategy of maneuvering."

"Obey my orders, lad." And then, as Ruderic did not move, he thundered, "Are you going to set the example of slack discipline aboard us?"

"Why as to that, uncle," retorted Ruderic, coolly, "Lord O'Conor is master here and I am master's mate, while you yourself are pilot. I take it that his lordship will fight his vessel, and if he orders me to steer, why, steer I must."

"Ruderic is right," said O'Conor, who, now that his throw was made, stood quietly alert and with every expression of strong authority. "He is the best fighting man aboard, and, since your own health is not entirely robust, I shall call upon you to handle the vessel."

Horrocks, without a word, took the wheel from the hands of the quartermaster and bade him join his mates. Then, as the distance lessened between the attacker and those awaiting attack, he gave order to lower the foresail.

"The schooner will obey her helm more quickly under

main and headsails," said he to O'Conor, "and there will be one less sail to occupy us. Those rogues are now wondering at the speed with which we overhaul them, and at our boldness in so doing. No doubt they are asking one another if we be not ourselves some jealous freebooter run down to dispute their spoils. Let fall the drop keel, Ruderic. We may have need of it to tack across their bows and rake them."

The picture now presented was one of those curious for their sinister aspect where the conditions of nature wear a perfect tranquillity. The sea was dimpling with a fresh, new breeze, the sky was cloudless, and the sun of such fervor as one might expect of early summer in the tropics.

A mile ahead, and almost in their course, the stricken merchant ship had settled slowly until her scuppers were nearly awash, and she still pursued her bewildered backing and filling, though sluggishly, like some dying thing which yet fights for breath. Her yards swung to and fro, their braces slackened, and she listed slightly to port as though lacking strength to preserve an equilibrium.

Three miles farther on, the ketch, with canvas filled and drawing, was holding to the northward in a sullen way, while the schooner, a smaller but faster vessel, had forged ahead of her by the matter of a furlong. Evidently she had no desire to leave her more sluggish consort, as presently the peak of her mainsail was dropped, that the speed of the pair should be more even.

O'Conor, calm and self-possessed as though engaged in the humdrum working of a passage, turned to Horrocks, whose great bulk loomed against the wheel. There was no trace of nervousness about the planter, whose smooth shaven and ascetic face was thoughtful rather than disquiet. He wore, as was his habit aboard the schooner, the same costume as on the plantation, and, being some-

thing of a dandy in his dress whether ashore or afloat, this was of the finest cut and texture.

The material was creamy linen, hand woven and a product of his Irish tenants' looms: frilled shirt and high stock with a black cravat, no matter how hot the weather; a coat of square skirts, with shoulders cut out so that the sleeves fell straight, and drawn snugly at the waist; the pantaloons, a little baggy at the hips, drew close about the ankles and were held by straps under the polished high-heeled boots. This coat he now laid aside, and he had rolled back the sleeve to the elbow of his bulging, muscular forearm. A sword belt was buckled about his neat waist, this carrying a long, broad sword of finely tempered steel, and he had thrust two pistols through his belt. Aside from the fact that he was not actually in uniform, no dandy officer in naval service could have presented an appearance of greater elegance on taking command of the deck to fight his vessel through an action.

"We shall bear down on the port quarter of the ketch, Master Horrocks," said he. "When within pistol shot, I shall give the order to luff smartly under her stern and rake her with our two amidship guns. Then, paying off quickly, we shall pass her close aboard and give her a volley of musketry and other small arms fired; this done, we shall forge ahead and execute the same maneuver with the schooner."

"Aye, sir," rumbled Horrocks.

"I shall then probably give you the order to go about and, rounding up under the stern of the ketch, we shall lay her alongside," said O'Conor. "It may then be 'away boarders,' but we should have finished our job before the schooner is able to bear a hand. I am going below for a moment to see that my daughter is well disposed of for our little brush."

He stepped to the hatch and disappeared, Horrocks looking after him with a puckered brow. He made a gesture to Ruderic.

"I fear," said Horrocks, "that in my hatred of the man I may have done some slight injustice to O'Conor. I had picked him for a bit of a poltroon, and was yesterday and again to-day convinced that I had made no error. But in all justice I must give him credit for the sang-froid which is his due."

Ruderic nodded. "I am quite of your opinion, uncle," he answered. "O'Conor may be a villain and a blackguard, but, as I just overheard that boisterous scoundrel, Dirk, remark, in his quaint speech, he is no cow baby. Now that we have led him into the shindy, one might say that he enjoyed the prospect of it."

Horrocks smiled grimly. "Indeed one might," said he; "and it is far from his first. The man is of the type of the medieval merchant pirate, a tradesman in avarice and cunning, but of heart a plunderer. Do not let his debonair conduct affect your hatred of him. I know his species, and if a man 'may smile and smile and still be a villain,' so also may a man 'fight and fight and still be a villain also.'"

Chapter XXI

AT this moment there was presented a scene of infinite pathos to those who love good ships, and have been shipmates with them.

As *Hirondelle* drew abeam the stricken bark, they could see from the water sluicing in and out her scuppers as she rolled sluggishly in the heavy ground swell that her decks were even now awash. The buccaneers in their haste to be gone would not have pierced her very freely, so that, lightened by the bulk of her cargo, the slow settling of her might be likened to that of a big tin pot pierced by a few pin pricks.

In previous years it was the custom of the buccaneers to sail such vessels to their place of rendezvous, there to beach and strip them, or should there be a war to sail them to the port of some power that might be an enemy to the flag under which the *Trige* had sailed and sell her for perhaps a quarter of her value.

But these hyenas of the sea had recently been taught caution in a series of rough drubbings by the new and growing navy of the United States, and their secret colonies discovered and disrupted, and from time to time some few of them would dance a sailor's hornpipe on empty air. Wherefore it behooved them to remove the evidences of their guilt as soon as might be, and no doubt in the present case they were aware of the patrolling squadron engaged in the combing of those waters. They might even have sighted the tall and stately frigate as she walked down through the fairway, and perhaps the whippet hounds trotting on either flank. The buc-

caneers did not dare to fire the bark and thus advertise what had happened by her columns of smoke. Nor did they dare place a keg of powder on her keel and touch off its length of fuse for the same reason.

But it is no easy job to bore through the thick and heavy oak of a ship's bottom, especially be it waterlogged from long immersion, and the auger dull.

This slow succumbing by a trickle of the invading flood in which for so many years the brave old bark had plowed furrow after furrow with her bluff bows now rendered her drowning the more pitiable, like that of a strong but wearied swimmer, who, washed from the deck of some ship by a sea which sweeps her, may struggle manfully on for hour after hour until, his forces waning, he settles lower and lower with vain searching about of his limited yet limitless horizon as he sinks in a trough or is borne upward on the crest of a wave. Far better for him who sinks at once, and as it now seemed to those watching this foul tragedy of the sea for a ship to get her death blow from a gaping wound by which the agony is not prolonged. Such a vessel settles quickly, until with bows flung upward or plunging down, she seeks her final rest in that port of missing ships—the ocean bed.

But in the present case it was more agonizing, especially to Ruderic and Horrocks who were builders of ships and saw them from the viewpoint of parent or creator. For the bark was trimmed so evenly as to her ballast and such cargo as remained, and the sea so smooth, that she exhibited no mortal convulsion. As they watched her from a distance of less than half a mile a long, low swell crept slowly the length of her gunwale, and for a brief moment there was presented the singular spectacle of spars and sails full and drawing with no ship beneath them. Then slowly the flood crept up toward these, quenched courses, then royals, then topsails, until for a brief moment of all

that vessel there remained only her dauntless ensign fluttering from the truck. And then this, too, was gone as with no swirling suction or commotion the infinite and endless waves swung on remorselessly over the vacant place where that ship had been.

Even the piratical crew, hardened and calloused by many scenes of scathe and intent anticipation of death grips close at hand, were moved by this gentle obliteration of a valiant fabric which was the toil of human hands. Dirk's husky oath found reflection in the breast of Ruderic.

"Hounds of hell!" swore Dirk, "now do you bide a bit below there, good old barkie, till we send a crew of sorts to man ye till the Judgment Day," and he drew his cutlass with a flourish and looked hungrily ahead.

Hirondelle was rapidly overhauling the deep-laden ketch, at best a sluggish sailor and now the heavier for stolen booty. The distance intervening lessened to half a mile, a quarter, when suddenly a white puff sprang from the stern of the ketch, and a solid shot, a nine-pounder, struck the water almost under the schooner's bows but a little out of line, and ricochetted so closely past that those on deck could feel the pulse of air.

O'Conor called to Dirk who was standing on the forecastle ahead at the breech of the bow chaser, the new French gun they had got at Lorient.

"Begin firing!" he ordered. "Lay the gun high for deck or rigging."

"Aye, aye, sir!" roared Dirk. He touched his match to the priming, then thumbed the vent with a practised hand. The ball, a six-pounder, whirred away, and although it did not find its mark they could see from the ducking of figures aboard the ketch that it must have passed close above their heads. Dirk swore, and the sponger handling his long swab then tore off the light fabric that encased the charge of powder at its breech, his strong yellow

fangs serving this purpose, and rammed it into the muzzle, and after it the wad and shot.

The ketch fired again, and the shot this time struck alongside the schooner, throwing a column of spray over those clustered in the waist. At a range of about three hundred yards, Dirk again essayed his skill which this time was vindicated. There flew from the deck of the ketch a mass of splinters and for a moment her mizzen mast, with its bellying sail, was seen to sway, then forward it went and by the board.

“Bravo!” cried O’Conor, “a center shot!”

The ketch payed off a little, while her crew turned their hands for the moment to the clearing of the wreck which hampered them. But before they could accomplish much in this direction *Hirondelle* had swept up close under the stern, and on her starboard quarter, when, at a signal from O’Conor, Horrocks thrust down his helm and cut across the ketch’s wake.

“Now let her have it,” cried O’Conor, “howitzers and muskets.”

Two tongues of flame, visible even in the brilliant sunshine, spat out from the schooner’s side, and a volley of musketry. But the buccaneers had snatched up their weapons and replied to this with spirit. Two of the *Hirondelle*’s crew fell back upon the deck, and then, as the schooner ran out from the smoke drifting in her lee, the ketch’s mainsail was seen to be sagging, the halyards cut by musketry or grape delivered at point blank range. But O’Conor, not waiting to continue his action with her, ran on past while the crews of both vessels continued to fire at will.

O’Conor had for the moment accomplished even more than he had hoped for, and, having crippled the larger vessel of the two, now wished to make sure of the schooner before risking injury to his own rig.

Horrocks, smiling grimly and stanching the blood from a splinter wound in his forearm, turned to O'Conor.

"Well maneuvered, sir," said he. "We have winged this vulture and may now pick her up at our leisure. She has but the two guns, bow and stern chasers. Now here comes a shot from the former."

Even as he spoke the buccaneers fired from their bow gun, but though well laid the shot did no more than to pierce the bulwarks and, grazing the foot of the foremast, tear its way through the port corner of the forecastle head, inflicting otherwise no injury. She fired again a moment later but missed, and *Hirondelle*, hauling rapidly out of range in pursuit of the smaller quarry, did not reply.

Horrocks watching narrowly the schooner less than a mile away looked at O'Conor and shook his head.

"I do not think that they will fight, sir," said he. "As we are flying no commission pennant, nor have any of the other indications of a naval vessel, they have most likely come to the conclusion that we are a pirate of sorts, and considering themselves to be outclassed they will probably surrender in the hope of some division of the spoils."

But in this he proved mistaken. The buccaneers were a desperate crew, and, having no accurate knowledge of such vessels as might be employed for their extermination, doubtless decided that it were better to die fighting in a forlorn hope than tamely upon the scaffold. They knew well the short shrift they might expect if taken alive, for the world was weary of their depredations and atrocities, and the hands of all men were now turned against them. So as *Hirondelle* hauled swiftly in upon her she was greeted by a fusillade of small-arms' fire, for the little schooner could boast no guns. O'Conor, cool and self-possessed and seeing no danger to his schooner's rig or hull, did not allow himself to be drawn into a duel that

might cost him several of his crew. He ordered that the men lie down behind whatever shelter offered, and stand by to board.

“Sound strategy,” muttered Horrocks to Ruderic who had come up from the waist where he had been examining the damage inflicted to the foot of the foremast just beneath the collar wherein were the belaying pins for the securing of halyards and other gear. “In a fusillade with firearms, especially at sea, there is not much to choose in the men behind them for it takes no great strength nor courage to lay the butt of a musket to the shoulder and to crook a finger on the trigger, while the brawnier and bigger of bulk the musketeer, just as he offers a wider target. But fighting hand to hand any one of these lusty ruffians of ours is worth a dozen of such spawn made up of mongrel renegades, rotten with rum and tropical disease, with their fair sprinkling of slinking half-breeds, mulattoes, and mestizos and alcatraces and the like.”

“It may be good strategy so far as concerns our fighting force,” answered Ruderic and looked at O’Conor with an admiration that even his theoretic hatred was unable to quench, “but it is not such as regards himself, the only man except us two, thus fully exposed.”

Horrocks, on whom the fight had acted as a stimulus of mind and body, gave a low laugh that rumbled from his chest almost like a growl, the first sign of mirth in which he had indulged since the beginning of their voyage.

“That, too, is sound,” said he. “For even at the risk of ball or splinter, your good commander must always inspire the respect of those he commands. Scoundrel and blackguard Black O’Conor may be, but in all fairness we must give him credit for a man of cool and valiant qualities. Do you get below the bulwarks as we draw in

on them and do not expose yourself to unnecessary risk. Remember that you have a duty to fulfill."

Ruderic would have disregarded this admonition if only in very pride and not to be outdone by their commander, but at this moment there came up from the foot of the companionway the pleading voice of Sheila.

"Ruderic," she called, and looking down through the darkened aperture he saw her white face framed against the bulkhead.

"Go down for a moment, lad, and calm her fears," said Horrocks, and he said it less for Sheila's sake than because the pistol and musket balls were flying and he desired that Ruderic be less exposed if only for a short space.

Ruderic glanced at the schooner, still some two hundred yards ahead, then slipped below. It was his intention to lead Sheila into her cabin, then stepping out close the door and shoot the bolt of it, for it had entered his mind that in her agitation and dread of what could happen her father, she might expose herself to the risk of a stray shot. Then, as he reached the foot of the ladder, Sheila stepped forward so that she was close against him, and looking up into his face, dropped her two hands upon his shoulders.

"Ruderic," said she, "I am not in the least afraid. We O'Conors do not know what it is to be afraid, but such is our honor that we cannot lie, and—" she added with naïve Irish paradox, "I lied to you this morning."

"You lied to me?" asked Ruderic, bewildered.

"Why, yes," said Sheila and smiled. "I lied to you in saying that I had played the coquette and used you for the practice of that art. But now that you are going to fight, and may be killed, I wish first to confess my fault and have your absolution," and she drew a little closer.

"Then if it was not that," asked Ruderic, much perplexed, "what was it?"

"It was this," said Sheila. She raised herself on tiptoes

and her bare, cool arms slipped suddenly around his neck. She drew him close, surprised and unresisting, and her bosom was pressed against his chest. He found his head drawn down less by her strength than some magnetic force against which there was no resistance in him. Sheila's violet eyes seemed to unite and coalesce into one deep pool of swimming blue. Then he felt her lips pressed against his own, and tasted their sweet fragrance for a brief instant before she loosed herself and thrust him from her.

"It was for that, Ruderic," said she, "just that and nothing else," and, turning suddenly like a bird thrusting itself from the bough, she slipped away and into her cabin and slammed the door of it, which Ruderic no longer thought of bolting.

Chapter XXII

HIRONDELLE bore down upon the smaller schooner, less in the nature of a swallow than a shrike.

There coming at this moment a slight flaw of breeze, it required all of Horrocks's strength and skill to lay the schooner alongside without great damage to the pair of them. For the buccaneers, perceiving his intention and desiring to continue their duel of musketry as long as possible before coming to grips, luffed sharply into the wind. Horrocks had then quickly to make his choice between ramming and sinking the smaller vessel or shooting past her with his strong headway. But there was an alternative made possible only by the quick handling of a vessel of *Hirondelle's* uncommon type, which, when forced to do so, was able to swing in her own length almost in the circumference of a circle.

This, to the astonishment of the buccaneers, Horrocks was able to accomplish by virtue of his great strength and aided by the lowering of the foresail. Finding himself on the schooner's weather quarter, he thrust his helm hard up instead of down, won close under the stern, then spinning the wheel in the reverse direction thrust down the helm again. *Hirondelle*, thus smartly luffed, shot up on the lee side of the little schooner, and instead of crashing into her came to a standstill almost in stays and with the sides of the two vessels chafing gently in the swing of the sea.

O'Conor, delighted with the maneuver, whipped his sword from its sheath and held it above his head.

"Away boarders!" he roared.

It was like a huntsman slipping the leash of his pack.

There had been some random shots, one of which had grazed O'Conor's temple, so that the blood was running down his lean cheek. But Dirk and his crowd on their bellies behind the stout bulwarks were unscathed and now, with a yell, shrill and bloodcurdling, they rose up and swarmed over them and fell upon the gang waiting stoutly to receive them.

The bright tropic sunshine flashed from knife and cutlass first in shimmering metallic sheen, then crimson as thrust and slashing blow went home. The buccaneers, to their credit, fought stubbornly though from the very start outclassed. It is probable that at first sight of their savage antagonists they saw no hope of any quarter given even for such space as might intervene between their capture and the gallows. It may have flashed across their minds that here was a worse band of cut-throats than they, a pirate of pirates, a slaughterer of slaughterers, the butcher of butchers.

Ruderic was with Dirk on the crest of the wave that poured over the bulwarks to break upon the vessel's decks, where in a confusion of boxes and bales of plundered goods not yet stored below the conflicting medley spun and wove and eddied like a surge on the shore as it dashes over and between scattered rocks.

The muskets had been cast aside, pistols emptied at the first rush, and though many were down on either side, and it was impossible to tell which of these were *hors de combat* and which at grips, there were still a score who kept their feet and fought it out, with the cold steel.

Ruderic, by virtue of his activity and strength, did not find himself at any time sorely pressed. He had been trained by Master Horrocks in the use of edged and pointed weapons according to the different schools, the stout British play of cutlass, hack and thrust, the more artful and scientific fencing of the French with *épée* or

duelling *fleuret*, and the sinister Spanish method of rapier and poignard in right and left with a *capa* draped over the left arm for a shield.

All of this instruction now stood him in good stead, and he looked up presently to find the fighting over.

But not entirely over. The commander of the schooner, no doubt some gentleman adventurer fleeing imprisonment for debt or ill practice or to retrieve his dissipated fortune in any manner fair or foul that might offer, had not waited the attack, but chosen to make his own offensive. As the two vessels rubbed their flanks together he had leaped from his own to the quarter rail of *Hirondelle*, then down on her deck where, naked sword in hand, he saluted O'Conor with a mocking flourish.

"While these swine are busy with their swill, sir," said he, politely, "let us two match our quality in the manner of the gentlefolk which once we were."

"Speak for yourself, sir," said O'Conor, sternly. "For my part, I discharge a debt to flag and country."

The other gave a sardonic smile. "Both are so new that the obligation cannot be a deep one," said he. "My own is of longer standing, and on the credit side. I do but collect the living which the world owes me. On guard, sir!" And extending his blade, which was similar to that worn by O'Conor, he raised his left hand and tapped the deck twice smartly with his right foot. O'Conor was about to engage when the attention of both antagonists was arrested by a shout from the deck of the captured vessel.

A curious situation had suddenly developed. In laying *Hirondelle* alongside her quarry, no grappling hooks had been thrown out. O'Conor's crew had swarmed over from the forecastle head and waist while the buccaneer captain had leaped across from the taffrail of his schooner. Immediately thereafter the heave of the long, low swell

had drifted apart the two vessels, which fact had been observed but disregarded as of no particular importance.

But now suddenly it became of most vital moment. The little schooner had hung on the wind in irons, while *Hirondelle*, after brushing past her, had forged ahead the matter of some fifty or hundred fathoms before Horrocks, who had run forward to drop her headsails, could return to take the wheel. Ruderic's parting words to him had been, "The foremast has had a bad wippe and the first fresh puff may carry it away. We must fish the foot of it as soon as possible." And Horrocks, noting that the flaws were getting strong and squally, had feared for the spar and gone to ease the strain upon it.

As he returned now, a curious spectacle was presented. *Hirondelle* under mainsail alone was swinging to meet the wind unintended, with no fighting man of her crew aboard save Horrocks and O'Conor. And here was O'Conor, with drawn sword, facing a lean, ferocious-looking swash-buckler in a faded uniform of sorts and who had to him all the aspects of the professional killer. And nearly a cable's length away drifted the prize with the fighting crew of *Hirondelle* aboard, their combat over and they, watching with eager eyes for the duel about to be fought between the rival captains.

Of all those thus occupied it was only to Horrocks that the jeopardy of the situation became immediately apparent, and it struck him with a sudden grim humor, even though he was blown in his scant breathing from his efforts, purple of face and lips and with a vertigo of balance and vision. But his quick intelligence, not to be deflected by physical discomforts, told him immediately that all needed by this desperado adventurer was to run O'Conor through, then serve himself in like fashion, when putting down the helm with the way still on the schooner he might run up the headsails again and make

off with the vessel with naught to hinder—and Sheila in her cabin below.

Yet such was Horrocks's physical condition, for the moment, that he could only hold to the wheel, fighting for his breath. He had emptied his pistols on closing in, and he knew that should he try to use his hanger he might topple over in a syncope, for he was a very ill man, far more spent than he had confessed to Ruderic. Wherefore, struggling for his breath and equilibrium, he made no effort to interfere, finding it better first to get his breath.

The captain of buccaneers glanced in his direction, then looked at O'Conor.

"Is this affair to be between ourselves, sir?" he asked, "or must I fight with two?"

"Between ourselves," replied O'Conor, sternly, for he had not grasped the situation. "Master Horrocks, you are not to interfere."

Horrocks nodded his assent, and the two blades grated together, and at sight of this there came a wild cheer from those aboard the captured vessel, not one man of whom had yet perceived the danger, and Horrocks's empurpled lips were twisted into a grim smile despite his doubts, for at the very start he told himself that O'Conor was outclassed. The lean and sinewy gentleman of fortune (for there could be no question of his former quality) had the better of the planter by half a head of height and some inches to his reach, while his aquiline glare and pose and general suggestion of technic proclaimed him a master of the sword. Blacklegs like himself, who threw in with the buccaneers, were apt to be such, and it might have been some fatal affair that had led him to this occupation.

O'Conor, on the other hand, was for the most part, as Horrocks knew, a man of sedentary habit, and of whom the exercise was mental to the neglect of physical training. Though graceful of stature, one would not have given him

credit for any great amount of strength in wrist or shoulder, nor had he the visage nor expression of a fighting man. And Horrocks, obliged to admit his own bodily frailty, could not hope for any successful issue of the affair. It seemed to him that they had blundered fatally in thus permitting all hands to rush to the assault and leave their own decks unprotected.

But there was now no help for it. The prize was in stays and no effort being made to get her out of them, which might have proved no easy matter, deep-laded with booty as she was and trimmed carelessly by the head. Moreover she had no boats that Horrocks could discover, these having been left perhaps at her moorings for less encumbrance or perhaps because there was a dearth of small boats among the buccaneers.

Glancing then at the face of the buccaneer captain, Horrocks was seized by the sudden conviction that the man's ready opportunist wit had grasped the situation and the necessity that he make quick work of the affair. And immediately this fear became well-grounded, for he flung himself into the assault with a sudden swift ferocity that seemed as though it could not help but bring its speedy fatal issue.

For a moment or two Horrocks's laboring heart came near to suffocate him, then and there. A mist swam before his eyes and the brilliant sunshine became darkly opaque and the glittering waters indistinct. Then, as his senses slowly cleared, he discovered to his amazement that the duel was far less unequal than he had thought.

O'Conor, easily and lightly poised, was fighting entirely on the defensive and, as it seemed, with no great effort. The lightning thrusts of his antagonist appeared to play about him as though he wore some charm or fetish that deflected their direction, and in a way such was the truth, this amulet being none other than his sword. A

slight smile rested on his thin, ascetic lips, and presently it froze there in a sort of mocking mask.

The buccaneer, as if realizing that he had underestimated the skill of his antagonist, abruptly changed his tactics. From pressing O'Conor with a vigor that must soon have spent itself, he retired into a more defensive policy, as if desiring to admit failure and fatigue in the hope of leading his opponent to an initiative that might entail his exposure. But O'Conor did not fall into this trap. He fenced on with a sort of academic technic, more as one who gives an exhibition or engages in a tournament for sport than a man fighting *a l'outrance*. His dark eyes alone showed a sort of fatal determination, and a faint flush began to color his lean cheeks. Horrocks, watching him intently, experienced an overwhelming relief that went far to the re-establishment of his condition. A swordsman himself of no mean ability, he now perceived in the sleek and elegant planter a perfect master of his weapon.

So perhaps did the blackguard who opposed him, for his face, from being stamped with a ferocious eagerness and exultant confidence in the result, grew haggard and anxious of expression. No doubt also the profligate excesses to which the buccaneers were wont to lend themselves began to tell upon him. A rime of sweat appeared upon his forehead, and from the glistening wetness of the back of his sword-hand the observant Horrocks guessed that its grip also must be growing slippery.

And this is precisely what occurred. O'Conor, whose sword point had been weaving little circles no larger than one of Sheila's bracelets, made a thrust so quick that it was like the striking of one of the myriad serpents on his estate, and had already recovered when the weapon of the buccaneer flew up in a glittering arc and over the quarter-rail, against which he had gradually retreated.

And then O'Conor, with no change of manner or expression, but cold and merciless as the aforesaid serpent, thrust suddenly again and ran him through the heart. The arms of the buccaneer flew wide. His aquiline face expressed for a flitting second an intense and overpowering amazement. Then the low rail took him from behind so that he lurched backward, and, falling overside, the waters garnered him.

O'Conor, breathing easily and in no distress from the encounter, turned to Horrocks with lifted eyebrows and the frozen smile still set upon his monkish lips.

"It might have been more advisable to have saved him," said he, with a slight accent of regret, "but I dislike to see a gentleman, even though a wrong one, hanged upon the gibbet."

Horrocks's head thrust forward between his great, hunched shoulders. The question that burst from his lips was out before he thought to check it back.

"Have you always felt thus, my lord?" he asked, harshly.

O'Conor looked surprised. "Why, yes," he answered, "and why not? The one regret of my life has been that I should have built up my fortune by precisely such calamity befalling a brave gentleman and highly esteemed neighbor. But," he glanced contemptuously over the side, "in the case of this ruffian it didn't greatly matter. He had by deliberate ill-conduct forfeited all claim to consideration. And besides it occurred to me, even as we engaged, that he had only to run me through, then turn and treat you likewise, to make off with the schooner. And my little daughter is down there below."

Chapter XXIII

THE next act of this singular drama was such as even Horrocks, for all his foresight, could never have anticipated. He and O'Conor and Sheila, who had come on deck, dragging after her the trembling Lanty, watched it with an astonishment not devoid of genuine amusement.

As the buccaneer captain struck the water and went down to his final rest upon the coral bed below (unless John Shark performed the services of undertaker) a great shout went up from the prize.

"A cool 'and, the marster," bellowed Dirk, his smudged and gory face aglow with admiration. "'E fights 'is ship and runs through 'is man like some kid-gloved tof of the Royal Navy—a proper gamecock, say I."

This sentiment was echoed by a gaunt Pict with his arm in a rough sling. "A bony fighter, The O'Conor," said he. "But 'aw' the O'Conors are that."

"Well, my hearties, and 'ere's a good job but 'arf done. Now bear a 'and and 'eave o' with these dead ducks (for the savage crew, bloodied the first time for years, had not left one man of the buccaneers alive) and let us starnd over to the schooner for further orders."

But Ruderick, who had been watching the crippled ketch with a puzzled expression, raised his head.

"Hold hard, Dirk," said he. "Here comes the ketch our way."

Dirk wrinkled his low forehead. "W'y, so she do, sir—and wot for, I arks you, sir?"

"That's what I'm asking myself," Ruderick answered,

"and unless I'm wrong, it's because she thinks we've got the worst of it."

Dirk scratched his head. "And w'y for does she think that, sir?" he asked, bewildered.

"And why should she not?" demanded Ruderic. "They saw us luff alongside, then sheer away. And now they see our schooner tossed up into the wind with headsails dropped and no activity aboard her. From this they argue that we have flown our falcon at an eagle and got the worst of it."

Dirk's square bulldog face showed that he had caught this new phase of the affair.

"Right you are, sir," said he. "Says she to 'erself, now if she 'ad got the best of it, she would 'ave 'ung on, but gettin' the worst of it, she 'as 'auled orf and for some reason or t'other she dare not 'oist 'er 'eadsails."

"And in that she is right," said Ruderic. "The foot of the foremast is gouged for a quarter of its girth, and splintered for another quarter by that last shot from the ketch. We shall have to do a fishing job before it is safe to bear the weight of canvas. Now here is a chance to play a trick upon the ketch. Tell the men to shift quickly into the shirts of such of these dead dogs that wore them and smut their faces still a little more. Then get this tub under steerage way, and as the ketch comes up let us lay her aboard and take charge."

The orders were quickly understood and executed. The men disguising themselves in rough fashion, backed out the headsails and got the heavy boat under control of her helm. Meantime the ketch came limping up, confident that the tide of combat had surged in their direction to turn the scales so that they might yet achieve the capture of the schooner, all unconscious of the reception awaiting their glad hopes. To these sea wolves the loss of sundry of the pack was no just cause for sorrow. "The more the

merrier, but the fewer the better fare," was a motto that fitted their method, and with the argument of that prince of pirates, Sir Henry Morgan, "If our numbers are few our hearts are great, and if there are not many of us, then will there be less among whom to divide the spoils," was most sound and excellent reasoning.

So now to those aboard *Hirondelle* was presented a comedy of sorts. The astute Horrocks had already guessed at what was taking place and of which the immediate events justified his prophecy.

They saw the ketch drift up to meet her consort with every symptom of delight aboard her decks. Then the schooner payed off slowly and the two small craft came together.

Followed a repetition of what had so recently occurred. They could see the ebullition of figures leaping over the bulwarks and they caught faintly the sound of barking pistols and savage yells. This turmoil lasted but for a minute or so. The crew of the ketch, taken unprepared until it was too late for the making of any effort of preparation, were cut down with scarcely any attempt at resistance. And the *Hirondelle*'s crew, not sharing the views of their master in regard to the value of prisoners taken, took none.

All was briefly over when Horrocks, hoisting an outer jib to give the schooner balance, stood back and fetched her alongside. The breeze was fresh, but the sea smooth except for small, dancing waves and the long and rhythmic swell heaving in from the ocean. All this had happened in the North East Providence Channel, landlocked except on a single side. To the north of them was great Abaco Island; to the south and east New Providence and the string of shoals which led up to the northeast of Eleuthera, while to the westward were the Berry Islands with their surrounding shoals, and an expanded eastern ex-

tremity of the many square miles of sands and flanks which form the Great Bahama Bank.

The slight cobble of waves offering no difficulties, O'Conor gave order that the work of transshipping the cargo be immediately undertaken. The blacks were freed and brought up from below and set at this labor, while the crew refreshed themselves and looked to the care of their wounds under the direction of Horrocks, whose fund of learning embraced no small skill as surgeon. Only three had been killed outright, while most of them had suffered injuries more or less severe.

But Ruderic's immediate anxiety was for the damaged foremast. "That spar was none too heavy at the start," said he to Horrocks and O'Conor. "Luckily for us, the foresail was not set when the shot struck, or we would have been dismasted. As it is, the first sharp strain must carry it away."

"Can you not cut out the planking around its foot and fish it in some fashion to get us home?" O'Conor asked.

"That would not be worth the labor and the loss of time, sir," Ruderic answered. "We are lying in a thoroughfare, and at any moment some ship of war might happen by and wish to look us over. You do not want to lose the blacks, so it seems to me that the best for us to do would be to lift out this stick, foreshorten it, and set it back again. We could then work well enough with two reefs in the foresail."

Horrocks nodded. "There is another thing we must consider, sir, besides the penalties for smuggling slaves," said he. "It is one thing to report in your own good time the destruction of buccaneers and the salving of a cargo looted by them. And it is quite another to be caught in the act of transshipping this cargo aboard your own vessel. What would there be to prove that you were in all honest intention of restoring it to the rightful owners?"

O'Conor was a man of temperate speech, but this suggestion drew an oath from him, although a French one. "*Sacre nom de Dieu!*" he snarled. "And am I never to get my coat skirts clear of all these damning and damnable circumstances?"

Horrocks shrugged. "It is unfortunate, but such is the situation," he rumbled. "You must appreciate, on a moment's thought, that, after our having appeared to lure a patrol ship on to a reef, not much credence would be given to any claims of ours. . . ." He stopped short in his speech and cocked his head to listen. They were standing by the rail at the foot of the main shrouds, and directly beneath them were the stern sheets of the ketch, which was made fast alongside, with the blacks swarming up and down through her main hatch with their burdens, like great black ants busily engaged in the salvage of their food supply or larvæ.

But through this hubbub and commotion some alien sound had caught the ear of Horrocks, who was against the rail. Ruderic had heard it, too, and before he could puzzle out its origin there seemed presented to some inner sight of his a stretch of desolate moorland with the fringe of gray sea fog driving in, a path strewn with broken flints, a trio of rough fellows and a lovely girl with great blue eyes, and the face of a terrified child rising from behind a clump of whins.

He brushed his hand across his eyes, puzzled at this vision and its cause. And at that moment Sheila, coming up from below, caught sight of his face and, noting its pallor and the strained expression of his eyes, she paused in quick concern.

"What ails you, Ruderic?" she asked. "You look as if you had seen a ghost. Have you any wound neglected?"

Ruderic shook his head, looking somewhat abashed.

"Nothing worse than a fleeting memory," said he, and

added, as if to himself: "This shindy must in some way have suggested to my mind the killing of Simon Peter. For a second it was as though we were standing face to face."

Sheila regarded him through narrowed lids. "And was it only Simon Peter that you saw?" she asked.

"Why, no," said Ruderic, taken unawares. "To tell the truth, I scarcely noticed him at all, because May Benton was standing just behind him."

Sheila's face was very grave. "Such visions are portentous, Ruderic. I do not wish to frighten you, but I fear that she must be in some grave danger."

And as she spoke there rose from somewhere below decks aboard the ketch a woman's stifled scream.

Chapter XXIV

RUDERIC, as though forewarned by his vision, was the least surprised at the wailing cry, and, laying his hand upon the rail, vaulted over it and down on the deck below.

Setting aside the supernatural, the fact of the matter is that it had not been a vision at all, but the cry, faintly heard in the babel of voices, had stirred a chord of recollection from its pitch and character identical to that of May Benton when attacked upon the moor. And the subconscious memory of this had made the picture in Ruderic's brain.

Jumping now to the companion hatchway of the ketch, he rushed below and, curiously enough, was the first of the victors to go below at all, for, in the haste and bustle of getting together the vessels, and clearing the decks of litter and loose gear and binding up their wounds, all hands had been too fully occupied to overhaul the prize. So now, as Ruderic burst into the cabin, he was more startled than astonished at the spectacle presented and of which his mind had been to some extent forewarned.

This cuddy, through very limited of space, was of a neatness scarce to be expected of a dirty crew of buccaneers. There was a mahogany table on which a heavy silver flagon of rum and some goblets were still standing in their fiddles. On a bunk lay a man of square frame with grizzled hair and chalky face, which at that moment presented the aspect of death, though his broad chest still rose and fell, and kneeling at his side, with a great profusion of disordered golden hair cascading about her shoulders, from one of

which the light fabric of her gown was torn away, May Benton sobbed and moaned.

Ruderic sprang to her side and laid his hand upon her arm. "May!" he cried.

She looked up quickly, suppressing the shriek about to burst from her at his touch. Her blue eyes opened very wide and they had that same look of the frightened and astonished child which they had held on the day when Ruderic had last seen her.

"Oh, Master Ruderic," she moaned, "I fear that my father is dying!"

Ruderic laid his hand over the heart of the unconscious man and felt it pulsate with fair strength. As he did so he discovered a blood-soaked bandage which was bound about the muscular arm above the elbow.

"He has fainted from loss of blood," said Ruderic. "Was that your father's ship which these rascals plundered and sank?"

May nodded. "It was the ship that he commanded," said she. "We were bound from Habana to New Providence, where we were to fill our cargo and then sail for home."

"And did they slaughter your crew?" asked Ruderic.

"Some few were killed in our resistance, but we were quickly overpowered, and such as survived they took off in the big open wherry. Then we are safe, Master Ruderic?"

"Yes, my dear," Ruderic answered, and described briefly what had happened. As he was talking, Master Benton stirred and opened his eyes, and Ruderic, pouring some of the aguardiente into a golden goblet, a chalice once consecrated to the sacred service of Holy Communion, held it to his lips.

"Come, May," said he. "I will send two of the hands to fetch your father, and Master Horrocks will care for his wound."

He led her up the ladder and on deck, where the sight of this lovely girl with great blue eyes and tumbled golden hair, emerging from the companion as some beautiful dryad might step from the rough trunk of her tree, caused a moment's cessation of all activities. But a harsh order from Horrocks and they were carried on again. Then, leaning over and thrusting his two great hands beneath her arms, the shipwright lifted May to the quarter-deck as though she had been the little girl her face suggested.

"Now, thankfully, we got here in time to save you, Mistress May," said he. "And your father?"

"Father is badly wounded by a ball through his arm, Master Horrocks," May answered, "but he still lives, though very weak from loss of blood." She looked timidly at O'Conor and Sheila and dropped her curtsy. "Your servant, my lord and Lady Sheila," she murmured.

Sheila, her eyes like sapphires and face very pale, stepped forward and took her by the hand. "Come below with me, my dear," said she, and led her to the companion.

Master Benton was brought up by two of the men and taken in charge by Horrocks, when the work of transshipping the cargo from both prizes was quickly accomplished. Then Ruderic, who had been keeping an anxious eye on the surrounding sky line, addressed himself to O'Conor.

"It is high noon, sir," said he, "and the chances are that the breeze will drop at sunset. Perhaps it would be better to get on our course and haul away as far from this position as we can while the wind lasts. Running without the foresail and under only mainsail and headsails, there should be no great danger of losing our foremast if we rig preventer backstays."

O'Conor nodded, moodily. "That is precisely my own advice," said he, "to run as long as we may, and when becalmed to make such repairs as we are able. Now send

a couple of the hands to scuttle these scows so that they may not drift about to bear false witness against us."

Ruderic was about to give the order when, casting his eyes back over the course which they had come, they were caught by a fleck of white just over the horizon.

"Look, sir," said he, "a sail."

O'Conor looked, then picked up the telescope and leveled it.

"Now had any man such foul luck!" he snarled. "Ruderic, unless I am going quite daft from fret and worry, yonder fellow is the very barkentine we led upon the rocks. You remember that she had a darker patch of weathered canvas in the tack of her foretopsail, and I seem to see it through the glass." And handing the telescope to Ruderic, he stepped to the hatch to summon Horrocks.

It needed but a glance for Ruderic to see that O'Conor's astonishing statement was well-founded, and this Horrocks, in his turn, corroborated. "There can be no doubt," said he. "She must have struck upon a smooth and shelving portion of the reef, on which she slid up without taking damage. The tide was about half flood, and by dint of shifting her ballast aft and carrying out her anchors well astern she has been able to warp off at high water, aided by the fact that her pitch was considerable, as we were able to observe."

"So that now she has us nailed to the counter," said O'Conor, grimly.

Horrocks looked at him thoughtfully and with a dull fire in his sunken eyes. He seemed to have aged and sickened in the last few hours. His face was ashen, his lips livid, and it is probable that if that skilled surgeon, Calloun, could have seen him, he would have said to himself, "Here is a dying man."

"Sir," said Horrocks, "I must ask you to answer a personal question that has important bearing on your position at this moment. In our crippled state we may or may

not be able to escape from yonder vessel. If taken, much will depend upon the testimony of Master Benton, whom we have been so fortunate as to rescue and can swear that we took no part in the act of piracy committed by the buccaneers. Now, sir, just what was your quarrel with Master Benton?"

To the surprise of both Horrocks and Ruderic, O'Conor's strained face lighted at this question.

"Why, as to that," he answered, "it was of a sort that should serve me particularly well in this juncture. During the Colonies' struggle for independence I spent some months on the west coast of Ireland, where I acted as the secret agent of the new-formed American Congress. Previous to this I had been on the coast of France, where, through my connections, I was able to furnish the supplies and munitions he required to Admiral John Paul Jones, at that time commanding the *Ranger*. In Imberon Bay, on February 14, 1778, the *Ranger* fired a salute of thirteen guns to the French fleet anchored in the Raide, and this was returned by a salute of nine guns from Admiral La Motte Picquet. As you may or may not know, this was the first official acknowledgment in Europe of American independence and the first official salute ever fired to the Stars and Stripes."

Horrocks's face became suddenly somber. "But what has this to do with Master Benton and your dislike for him?" he asked.

"That came later," said O'Conor. "When I was secretly operating on the coast of Ireland, and for the same purpose as in France, namely, to obtain stores and munitions and secrete them in some place convenient for supplying the ships of John Paul Jones or other American raiders, I visited the region about my ancestral home. Although in some measure disguised, I was recognized by Master Benton, who, himself English, had married an

Irish girl and lived in the locality. He gave me some few hours to quit the place, and warned me that he considered it his duty as an Englishman born, and a loyal subject of King George, to lay information which might lead to my arrest and execution. So do you wonder that I cherished a grudge against the meddling fool?"

Horrocks's aspect grew still more gloomy and his haggard features appeared to sag beneath the weight of a crushing disappointment, the dull glow in his eyes went out to leave them as lifeless as the eyes of a dead fish. "In that case, sir," said he, heavily, "I should advise that you go immediately below and ask Master Benton, as man to man and as rescuer to rescued, if he be willing to make deposition under oath of this service which he knows you to have rendered the United States of America."

"I shall do so," said O'Conor, "and there can be no doubt as to his answer, for I must admit him to be an honest man, for all his having spiked my guns."

When O'Conor had disappeared Horrocks turned to Ruderick. "Here is the end of our hopes, lad," said he, heavily. "Half an hour ago I thought we had this Irish herring gilled in our net. Yesterday I was convinced, from the way in which she ran upon the reef, that the barkentine had suffered no great hurt and that at the full of the flood she would manage to slide herself off as she has done. I thought it most probable, also, that, once clear, she would, with the coming of the breeze, hold on after us on the off chance of picking up our trail again, so that our falling in with these buccaneers seemed to be a dispensation of the god of vengeance."

Ruderick nodded. "The same occurred to me, uncle," said he, "and the damage to our foremast appeared to clinch the matter. I have been looking all the morning for the barkentine. It was plain enough that if she were to catch O'Conor with this cargo, and after the trick he

played her, all his protestations would have been in vain. There was nothing to prove that he had not been a party to the cutting off and pillaging of Master Benton's vessel. He would have been convicted of piracy and hanged for it by the Americans, just as he plotted and contrived that my own father was hanged for a pirate by the British."

"Aye," rumbled Horrocks, "and so would you, who are American born, been hanged likewise, and the other half of your revenge left unaccomplished."

Ruderic made a gesture of disgust. "I had already repudiated that part of my oath, uncle," said he. "Much as I have desired to avenge my mother, there are certain things which I could not force myself to do, not being an O'Conor."

Horrocks's hand fell on Ruderic's shoulder. "And you are right, lad," said he. "You are your father's son, as well as your mother's, and your father could never have lent himself to such an act. But now it is finished, Ruderic. O'Conor might be penalized for the running of slaves, but no court would convict of piracy a man who can be proven to have rendered such service as has he. And"—he glanced to the windward, where the barkentine was looming larger against the pellucid sky—"such being the case, we might as well swallow our defeat and run for it."

Ruderic shook his head. "Of what use, uncle?" he asked. "The breeze is fresh, but a full-sail one, and, short canvassed as we are, she is bound to overhaul us."

Horrocks smiled grimly. "Then let her overhaul," said he. "I know of a hole not far from here into which we can duck and where she dare not follow, even were she to find the entrance, which is doubtful." A sudden animation seized him. "Look alive now," he called, harshly, to the men who, the loading finished, were eyeing Ruderic and himself uneasily, for they had sighted the barkentine and suspected her identity. "Cast off and stand by to get under way."

Chapter XXV

THE order was smartly executed and *Hirondelle* at once laid upon her course, with wind abeam and only the outer jib to balance the drive of the big mainsail. Ruderic caused to be rigged backstays that might enable them to carry headsails. He did not dare hoist the foresail, although the need of it was great, the schooner being heavy-laden, while the breeze, though fresh, was not strong, and the quarter of it fair for the approaching barkentine. At the end of two hours Horrocks beckoned to Ruderic.

"You see those three high moles ahead, lad?" he asked. "Behind them is the snuggest harbor directly on open sea. It is on the end of Eleuthera, and one must round the point and run south some miles to enter, although at this end there is a bar across that I think *Hirondelle* could pass. If we can duck in there I do not think the barkentine would dare to follow, after her late mishap. But if she should, and the breeze in this quarter, we would have only to slip over the bar at the north end, when she would be bound to lose much time in beating out to the entrance."

"With such burrows and runways and hidden sounds and shoals and sand-bars as are strewn throughout this place," said Ruderic, bitterly, "O'Conor is a fool not to profit by the vessel we have built him. Crippled as she is, she can still slip away from the hands of the hunter, like a winged water ouzel."

Horrocks's face puckered in thought. "Ruderic," said he, suddenly, "I am forced to the conclusion that, aside from his one act of supreme villainy, Shane O'Conor is a brave and honest man."

Ruderic stared at him amazed. If Horrocks, atheist, materialist, denier of the All-Good, had said, "I am convinced of the existence of a just and living God," Ruderic could not have been more taken aback.

"I have studied the character of this man since we have been associated," Horrocks continued, "and I find it hard to reconcile his past actions with his present conduct. He is temperate of speech and action, and, though possessing a certain ruthless quality, is far from cruel or unkind. Though ambitious to gain great wealth he is no miser, but gives and spends more as a spendthrift, regardless of the amounts. We have seen that he is an adoring father, and we have seen also that there is no grain of cowardice in him, and that his fear is only of disgrace. He desires the esteem of his neighbors and to be regarded as a solid and substantial man and one of merit.

"Now, all these qualities," continued Horrocks, "in no way match with such past behavior as we are to require an accounting for, and I confess that I am sorely puzzled. His liberal offer to make you his partner no more fits in with his former treacherous avarice than would the head of an honest horse fit the scaly body of a crocodile. But most of all I am perplexed about the cleanness of his life, his abstemiousness of habit, and evident indifference to women. My experience of different folk has taught me that there are some human impulses that never change. A drunkard may reform, and so may a thief, and a man of violence turn preacher or evangelist. But the libertine does not reform. Once a libertine, always a libertine; and so O'Conor, having shown himself to be anything but such, and he a man in full vigor, it is difficult to understand how he could have risked what he did through an act of passion. For your mother was admired and beloved in the colony, and O'Conor must have known that there were many men who would have shot him down like a dog in

his very tracks if they so much as suspected him of this foul act."

Ruderic, his face dark and eyes lurid, as always happened at any mention of this subject, did not answer.

"Most men have their moments of madness," mused Horrocks, as if to himself, "but I cannot seem to fit this into what I have studied of this man's nature. Yet my evidence is so strong that I am unable to deny it. I tell you, Ruderic, that I would rather be crucified than find myself to be mistaken. If I have schooled you to hatred, through all these years, as the result of a fatal error, it would seem to me that I was deserving of that scorching hell of which I have denied the existence." Here his voice broke a little. "And yet I must confess to a terrible dawning doubt."

His speech was interrupted by the appearance of O'Conor, who now came on deck with a look of infinite relief upon his face.

"Master Benton readily agrees to bear me out in what I told you," said he, and glanced about him in some surprise. "What is the meaning of this maneuver? Why not heave to, since we cannot hope to escape?"

"I have every hope of escape, sir," said Horrocks, and explained briefly the plan which he had in mind. "If we can duck into that hole ahead before the wind drops we may yet give them the slip and, making our repairs to-night, get safely back to the plantation. Why lose your blacks and pay the penalty of slaving and expose yourself to a trial in court of suspected piracy if we can manage to get clean out of the broth and nobody the wiser?" He studied narrowly the barkentine, now well up over the horizon, and some three or four leagues distant. "We are holding our own with her, and if only the breeze does not fail us, we should win to safety by a wide margin."

O'Conor, after a moment's hesitation, accepted this de-

cision. Maimed as she was, *Hirondelle* was yet slipping easily through the water, while her great beam and roundly flattened bottom gave her, though laden, but a few inches of added depth.

So the anxious chase continued. The high moles ahead grew steadily higher, and presently they could see the land about them, and it became evident to all that they must win the race if only they could finish before the lightening of the breeze. Ruderic had rigged an extra forestaysail from the mainmast head to the foot of the foremast, and, this going far to replace the foresail, they seemed to gain a little on their pursuer.

Sheila presently came on deck and walked with her lithe, swinging gait to where Ruderic was standing moodily against the rail with the air of one who has lost all interest in immediate events. He was thinking somberly of what Horrocks had said to him, and at Sheila's approach his face hardened.

Her own showed the stress of strong suppressed emotions, and a sort of proud humiliation, for it seemed to the girl the sorriest trick that fate could play her that she had confessed her sentiments for Ruderic just prior to his rescue of his true love.

"Why do you not go down and speak to your sweetheart, Ruderic?" she asked.

Ruderic made a gesture of impatience. "May Benton is not my sweetheart, and never was," he answered, no longer seeing any use in a deception not of his own making.

Sheila flashed him a startled, disbelieving look. The color poured suddenly into her face. "What is that?" she asked. "But you yourself admitted it."

"I neither admitted nor denied it," Ruderic answered. "Since it appeared to please you to believe it, I saw no use in disabusing your mind of its error."

Sheila caught a quick breath. "But if it was not on

May's account, then why your obstinate dislike of my father and myself?"

Ruderic's brain was in a turmoil. His few minutes of concentrated thought on what Horrocks had just told him had led to a belief, which was almost conviction, that there had been some fatal error; a fearful misapplication of circumstantial evidence that had resulted in the ruin of his life up to this point and narrowly escaped perhaps its tragic termination, for there could be no happiness in a youth poisoned from infancy by an education of which the elementary creed was hatred, and the summit of future ambition, revenge. Ruderic's boyhood and young manhood had been spiritually poisoned, just as a child might be physically poisoned who grows up in an atmosphere of filth and vermin, unclean food and foul air. It was as though Ruderic's soul were puny and anæmic with impure blood that from time to time produced eruptive sores and ulcers, these latter (to maintain the simile) being, in the case of Ruderic, his not infrequent outbreaks of ferocious rage.

He had never loved, as little boys should love, a father, mother, nurse, or playmate, nor had he played, as little boys should play, with the joyous abandon of childhood. As Sheila had once said, he had never known the *joie de vivre*—the joy of living. For him there had lurked always in the background that awful creditor, Revenge. This grim genius had held a mortgage of his happiness, nor could this be paid off even should the day of settlement arrive. He was denied his heritage of content, pledged to the infliction of torment, consecrated to the joyless unpaid passion of hate.

As all of this whirled through his head in a chaos of confused weights and measures which made it impossible to strike the balance of his account, he became slowly conscious of one gradually accumulating emotion. If all of

this had been for naught, based on insufficient evidence, an accusation hastily and wrongfully leading to indictment, establishment of guilt, and pronouncing of sentence, then was the wrong done to him, Ruderic, too terrible for contemplation. Ruderic felt that if Horrocks had been guilty of this, then must his active hatred of Horrocks surpass even that passive, almost vicarious one that he had felt for O'Conor.

In such a case what mattered it that Horrocks had been invariably kind, that he had shown the devotion and generosity of a loving parent, caused Ruderic to be finely educated, supplied without the slightest hesitation all his physical needs? Ruderic's soul had been more darkly polluted by Horrocks's sophistries on duty and false philosophies directed against a humanity at large than would it be possible to corrupt any adolescent mind in the mere muddy filth of licentious living. For the creed of such a one must have found its fundamental principle in "I enjoy," whereas that of Ruderic had found it in the fearful words, "I hate."

So that now, in the distress of his bewilderment, he found it impossible to talk to Sheila or to answer the one riddle that she had asked herself and him since the earliest days of their association, "Why do you dislike my father and myself?"

Ruderic brushed away the question with an expression of annoyance that was a ridiculously weak exponent of the storm within him.

"I cannot talk about it now, Sheila," said he, forgetting for the first time, in his tension, to use her title. "My brain is confused, and I must give the whole of my attention to the duties at hand."

Sheila's face softened. Some months before such a dismissal would have angered her and aroused an outburst of haughty pride, but just as Ruderic's deeper nature had

been fighting subconsciously against the poison fed his soul, so, too, had Sheila's nature, naturally sweet and generous, been learning to resist her haughty impulses. No doubt, also, at the moment, she leaped to a wrong conclusion that Ruderic was suffering the reaction from the violence through which he had just passed. At any rate, and whatever the reason, she answered, with sweet sincerity, and a sort of joyous lilt in her low voice:

"There now, Ruderic, I am wrong to distress you with my silly inquisitiveness at such a time. Please forgive me." Her burning eyes held a sort of melting humility. "But somehow I cannot help but feel that the atmosphere is soon to clear, and that the worst of our troubles are over and our cross purposes are to be disentangled."

"I hope so," muttered Ruderic.

Sheila turned away, then looked back at him, over her shoulder, with a smile. "At any rate," said she, "if it is true that you don't love May for your sweetheart, why, then, I don't care much what may happen next."

The tears welled up in her violet eyes, and, with a little laugh that was half a sob, she walked away and went below.

Chapter XXVI

NOW whether Sheila's prophecy of an impending happy issue from their perplexities was one inspired or, as more often happens, a wish that was the parent of her thought, the situation soon after presented was no great vindication of it.

She might, in fact, be likened to the optimistic doctor who, in his treatment of a dangerous disease, gives voice to a favorable prognosis before the crisis draws near. None but a clairvoyant could have foreseen the crucial events ordained for the next few hours, and, although *Hirondelle* might have boasted such a seer within her complement—to wit, Lanty—this poor fellow was still so distraught from the scenes of carnage that he had not witnessed, but may have felt the atmospheric tension of, that, like some delicate instrument which has suffered a shock (as a telescope let fall on deck), his lenses were still out of focus and distorted the distant image so that it was blurred.

Hirondelle, with an ever-increasing lead on her pursuer, hauled a little on the wind, ran across the shoals off the northern extremity of Eleuthera, then, tacking somewhat precariously, got off what is known to mariners as the "Glass Window," a remarkable cliff from which the sun is reflected in such fashion as one sees when it blazes from the window of a house upon the shore, as though the edifice were all aflame within.

"There is the entrance," said Horrocks to O'Conor, "straight in for the mole." He gave the order, "Ready about," which Dirk repeated in a roar, and a moment later, "Hard a-lee."

It needed but a short leg to fetch them into the land-locked harbor, but at this moment occurred the catastrophe that Ruderic had predicted, and which he had taken such precautions as were possible to avert. The breeze, as often happens, had freshened a little before beginning slowly to abate, and, drawing at this moment off the land through the entrance that appeared to sluice and focus it, a vicious little puff caught the headsails, and before there was time to slacken the sheets there came a splintering crash and the foremast went by the board.

Hirondelle at this moment was almost in the gut, but not yet enough within it to permit any view of the harbor even from aloft. Ruderic, who was prepared for the emergency, ordered a kedge anchor let go to keep them from drifting away from their windward position, when, having quickly cleared away the wreck, the longer fragment of the foremast was secured alongside, and the stays of the headsails led from the schooner's stem to the mainmast truck, so that she might be able to work in some fashion around the point of Harbor Island, when a fair wind would carry her up into the harbor itself.

"So here's the end of it," said O'Conor, sourly. "It would have been better if we had hove to and taken our medicine when prescribed."

"On the contrary, sir," said Horrocks, "the sport has just begun. Once around this sandspit, we can slip up to the harbor's head."

"And what is the good of that?" O'Conor demanded, impatiently. "Even allowing that we may be able to set up what is left of our foremast in three hours' time, and then skim over the shoals of the farther end, the barkentine will be here by then, and, the breeze having fallen flat calm, we shall be at her mercy."

Even Horrocks, for all his craft, could find no answer

to this statement. Weather-wise as he was in these latitudes, he felt sure that the breeze would drop with the sun. But before this they might count on the government vessel making the entrance to the harbor, when she had only to man her boats and board them.

"In any case," said he, "let us play our hand as long as we hold cards." And he gave orders to lower a boat and carry out another anchor to warp the schooner ahead (for the tide was running strongly out) while some sort of jury-rig was being geared. Full-handed as they were, the work was quickly carried on, and presently the crippled *Hironnelle* was inside the entrance and in position to continue her course under pressure of her canvas. And at the same moment they sighted the topsails of the barkentine over the lowland at the head of the harbor.

"The tide has just begun to ebb," said Horrocks, studying the sandy beach which was within a cable's length. "If we can slip over the bar which forms the head of the bight we should have so great a lead on this fellow that, foremast or no foremast, he would never see us again. . . ." He paused and shaded his eyes with his hand. "Now, what is the meaning of that smoke rising all at once along the shore?"

Ruderic sprang for the rigging and was well aloft when the schooner, drifting slowly, opened up from behind a heap of high dunes a full view of the upper reach of the harbor, that was almost a sound. At the spectacle then suddenly presented, and which was plainly visible from the deck, also, Ruderic was not the only one to catch his breath and to feel such a bristling at the scruff of the neck as might cause the hackles of a hound to rise when passing a menagerie in which are wolves and tigers and other beasts of prey.

But in the present case the savage horde was far from being in captivity, but roaming freely about the confines

of a spacious lair. At the very first glance of a panorama, rapidly extended in its scope, Ruderic realized that they had blundered in upon a buccaneer community—a place of rendezvous, perhaps, or trading station for the barter of smoked beef and hog flesh and slaves and other merchandise of such sort as they might require, this trade among themselves and with no great danger of interference.

There were five vessels at anchor, all of them smaller than *Hirondelle* and of various rigs. A few small boats were plying between these and the beach, where Ruderic observed a number of shacks and shelters, wattle huts and tents rigged from spare sails and the like. There might be, at rough estimate, he thought, a hundred of the desperadoes. And here was *Hirondelle* gliding onward, with this hornet's nest ahead and a government vessel at her heels.

Ruderic slipped quickly down on deck, to find Horrocks and O'Conor staring aghast at the dilemma in which they found themselves so unexpectedly.

"Now, here is a pretty kettle of fish!" growled Horrocks, in the rumbling tone of a perturbed mastiff. "Just as I had thought our difficulties over we find ourselves between the devil and the angel with the flaming sword!"

"The place is lousy with the vermin," snarled O'Conor, "and we can muster a scant dozen sound and able fighting men." And there are Sheila and the Benton girl."

* "If it were not for them," said Horrocks, "I should advise that we attempt to fight our way through. But with their numbers and our crippled state such an effort must be a desperate one. On the other hand, we are more deeply compromised than ever, from merely putting into this place with a plundered cargo aboard. This would be considered as proof positive that we came here to dispose of it."

O'Conor, his face blanched, was cursing to himself in some alien tongue. "Then what are we to do?" he asked. "You got us into this pickle, so for the love of the saints suggest some way to get us out of it again."

"There is but a single way that I can see," said Horrocks, and continued in brisk and rapid words: "We must convince these gentry ahead that we are of the same fraternity as themselves. We shall say that we cut off Master Benton's bark and looted her, then, sighting the barkentine, and suspecting that she might be a government vessel, we ran for this place to give her the slip."

"And the buccaneers that we destroyed?" O'Conor asked.

"Say that they made off, on sighting her, and escaped, and that she gave us chase, as we were the larger and more important prize. The fact that we are running blacks will prove us to be an outlaw. We may then offer to share the booty in payment of their protection. The barkentine will not venture to attack, once she sights the swarm that is here, especially as she believes us to be of the same boiling. She will put out again and no doubt hang on and off, waiting assistance. Meantime we may quickly set up our foremast again and steal out with the flood tide to-morrow morning before dawn. But one thing is certain. The villains must not catch sight of Sheila and May Benton, nor must they be aboard. For if aught were to go wrong with our project their fate would be such as can be too-easily imagined."

"Then what are we to do with them?" O'Conor asked.

"Let us set them ashore immediately over on the beach to port. That is a narrow neck of land that they may make their way across to the other side. Once we are clear of the place we may put in there and take them off. Let Ruderic go with them for their comfort and protection,

and also Dirk, since we cannot hope to make a fight. And it would be well to send Yellow Jack also with them."

"Why Yellow Jack?" demanded Ruderic. "I detest the scoundrel, and he has no great love for me."

"Then serve him as you did his *confrère*, Simon Peter," said O'Conor, coolly. "Horrocks is right, and I understand his reason. We cannot trust the fellow. It is more than likely that he would betray us to the buccaneers. The rest of them are honest-enough cutthroats who will keep their faith, always under promise of reward. But there is something about this scoundrel of a Yellow Jack which has led me to believe that he would play us false at the first good chance to manage it with profit. And, one thing more, Ruderic; if something should go amiss and we fail to appear in the offing, then make your way down to the sandspit at the entrance and signal to the barkentine."

There was no time for more deliberation. The schooner was sluggishly stemming the ebbing tide and they could see already a great activity among the buccaneers, still some four miles ahead. The beach on the western side was less than a furlong distant—high sand dunes, and farther back the green of vegetation. A small dinghy was dropped into the water, and aboard her were placed the two astonished maidens, followed by Dirk and the scowling Yellow Jack (whose crafty mind may have guessed at the reason for his presence), then Ruderic and a man to fetch back the boat. They took with them a supply of food and water, with such weapons as they might need.

"Keep a weather eye on Yellow Jack, lad," muttered Horrocks as Ruderic was about to go overside, "and at the first hint of treachery serve him out his gruel. He has already merited the gallows for a ripe score of years."

The boat put off under shelter of the schooner and quickly grounded on the sand, when Dirk and Ruderic

stepped out and, wading through the shallows, carried their soft and tender charges to the dry beach, followed by Yellow Jack, well burdened with supplies. They quickly sought the shelter of the dunes, where, standing waist deep in the swaying sedge, they watched the schooner drifting slowly on to meet whatever fate might hold in store for her.

Chapter XXVII

THE little party had landed at the very foot of the largest of the six big moles, rising only a mile or two apart, on the expanded end of the northern point of the long, narrow ridge of terra firma known as Eleuthera Island, this extremity being triangular in shape, a scant ten miles in length and, where they had disembarked, some four or five miles across to the big shallow bay on the western side.

It was there that Horrocks hoped to take them off before dawn of the following day, should his plan succeed. Ruderic now explained this to his charges, and, such had been their haste in getting away, it was also news to Dirk and Yellow Jack.

"I see no reason for its failing," said Ruderic, in conclusion; "the buccaneers should have no reason to suspect us of having sent their fellows to Davy Jones's locker. There was no fighting on our decks, except that clean affair of his lordship, and the damage from gunfire must appear to have been done by the merchant vessel we claim to have cut off, to which Master Benton may be induced to testify."

"'Ow about that pirogue that scuttled orf as we come up, sir?" queried Dirk.

"She made for Abaco," Ruderic answered, "to profit in the fair breeze that was springing up. If she put off from here she will scarcely return to-night or before she thinks the coast is clear."

Yellow Jack, standing sullenly aloof, remained silent, making pretense that he took small interest in the situation. No doubt he had formed swift and sinister plans

of his own at first sight of the buccaneers that infested the place, and was now in a state of suppressed fury at finding them thus balked. Ruderic, watching him narrowly, but covertly, could see that he was listening intently to what was being said, and with this in mind he said to Dirk:

"Even if his lordship should be obliged to forfeit our entire cargo, including the blacks, none of you hands ought to be losers by it. You have only to hold your tongues and obey orders, and you shall all be paid off with more than ample to cover what your share of this cargo would fetch. There might also be a bonus for past good behavior. By this time you must have learned that his lordship is generous and free-handed to those who serve him well."

"That's wot, Master Ruderic, and his ludship 'as the right of it in saying that the good old times is gone, and no charnce left for stout-earted lads as might like to turn their 'ands to a little job of piratin'."

"Well, then," said Ruderic, "let's shoulder our gear and make our way across to the other side."

"Righto!" said Dirk. "We carn't do no good 'ere, and might as well shift hover," and the stout ex-pirate, honest according to his dimmed lights, shouldered his part of the duffle, and would also have burdened himself with that of Ruderic had he been permitted. But Ruderic, mindful of his charge and seeking this pretext for disarming Yellow Jack, whom now more than ever he distrusted, slung across his shoulder the three muskets, shoved the pistols through his belt, and took also the heavy gourds of water. Then, bidding Yellow Jack to pick up what was left, they turned their faces westward and set out.

For some distance it was heavy going through sand and saw-edged scrub palmetto. But presently they came to firmer ground and, skirting the foot of the mole, passed be-

tween it and a smaller one upon their right, coming to a bayou on which were massed great quantities of water-fowl. They passed around the head of this.

A mile or so beyond they reached a low ridge from which they were able to see the shallow waters of the bay at no great distance, and, on the edge of it, another mole and some hummocky hills. They had come upon no trace of human occupation, nor did Ruderic think they should, the camp of the buccaneers being on the island which formed the harbor on its eastern ocean side.

Sheila and May Benton had scarcely spoken since leaving the schooner. Of the two, it seemed to Ruderic there was little to choose in the undaunted courage with which they faced the present crisis. They had in common the same torment of anxiety, this directed toward the welfare of their parents far more than as to what might happen to themselves. Master Benton's wound, though costing him much blood, was in the fleshy part of his thick forearm, and Horrocks had pronounced it of no great danger. So that the doubts and fears of both these girls were directed entirely toward what might be expected from the reception of the buccaneers.

Worthy Dirk, that honest cutthroat and doughty fighting-man, be it in fair cause or foul, sought to allay their fears as he plodded on in the waddling gait peculiar to stout legs accustomed through a lifetime to the wet and heaving deck.

"Now, mark ye, my young ladies," said he, pantingly, yet untroubled of wind, "there's naught to fear from these 'ere scalawags. Firstly, 'is lordship 'as a way to him, and 'is elegant way of speakin' would charm the little birdies off the boughs. This 'ere scum will say to theirselves: 'Now, 'ere's a proper pirate, a Sir 'Enery Morgan come to life again, a deep-sea swell, and us short chops. I doubt they 'ave the cheek to arsk for hanythink.' While as for

Master 'Orrocks, now 'ere we 'ave a rare old 'ound 'arf devil and 'arf scholard—axin' your pardon, Marster Ruderic, for such himpertinence anent your huncle. But 'ark now, young ladies, Marster 'Orrocks 'as the wisdom of the sarpint under the bones and 'ide of a lion, and, what is more, if there be any oldsters 'mongst the buccaneers they are like to remember him 'as 'avin' sailed with Redbeard 'oo was mate of Captain Edward Teach, that gory pirate Blackbeard that was give his gruel by Lieutenant Maynard of the Royal Navy. . . ." Dirk, stirred by these recollections, lost suddenly the thread of his discourse. "Ah but them was the days, mateys all! 'No prey, no pay,' and seldom lack of both. 'Old 'ard, now, Dirk, and don't fright the pretty dears."

"How old are you, Dirk?" asked Sheila.

"Fifty and odd, and your sarvent, my lady, and, thanks to 'is lordship's bounty, 'opin' to die more 'onest than I have lived," said Dirk. "A little public 'ouse 'ard by Wapping 'Old Stairs or Lim'us—that would be a proper berth for an old sea dog as mayn't always 'ave feared God and loved the King, but never turned 'is back to pistol or a cutlass and was e'er ready to share 'is last chaw terbaccer with 'is mates." And, as though hungered by this proud boast, Dirk drew from a fold of his sash a queue of raw "plantation twist," and tore off a generous mouthful with his yellow fangs.

Thus beguiled by reminiscences, some absurd and others bloodcurdling enough, but losing much of their horror through Dirk's quaint phrasing, they came presently upon the dunes, through which they threaded their way. Several times during their progress Yellow Jack, who was in the rear, loitered, once to adjust his pack, another time to spill the sand from his shoe, and still again to cull a spiny fruit resembling a pear, which he appeared to relish. But, though his pretexts were plausible enough, Ru-

deric's suspicions of him grew and he confided them to Dirk.

"That yellow lizard means to give us the slip if he can," said he, "and, getting in touch with the buccaneers, betray us to them. Do you take one of these muskets and a pistol, Dirk, and, if he tries to play us false, match his speed with that of a chasing bullet."

Dirk grinned. "Let us 'ope, then, that 'e may try to let us down, Marster Ruderic," said he. "I 'ave mistrusted the sweep since that day I stretched 'im for 'is everlastin' growlin'. 'Be 'appy, blast yer eyes,' says I, and welted 'im a clout or two." He lowered his voice and said, in a hoarse whisper, "Marster 'Orrocks 'ates 'im, too, and I 'ave a notion that 'e sent 'im with us 'opin' not to sight 'is yaller mug again."

The golden gleam that, until that day, had become almost quenched in Ruderic's tawny eyes poured from them now and seemed to play and flicker over Yellow Jack, who was plodding sullenly a few paces ahead. "Then he may not be so greatly disappointed, Dirk, for at the faintest hint of treachery I shall shoot or saber the reptile as I would some saffron-colored serpent I chanced to find upon my path. It seems to me that I can feel the venom which is nearly choking him, and it would be a grateful task to spill it out."

They came presently to the edge of the dunes and looked out upon a broad and snowy beach of a pitch so gradual as to seem flat, and of sand as fine as in an hourglass. The tide, though slight of altitude, was well out, and to such a distance did the shoals extend seaward that, as far as their vision carried, the water was a palish azure, and one would have said that a man might walk for miles straight out and not be wet above the knees.

Here, against the side of a sedgy hummock, they made a camp, of sorts. Dirk, motioning Yellow Jack to bear him

company, withdrew to a respectful distance out of ear-shot. May Benton, weary and spent from the agitation of the day, followed by their fatiguing journey afoot, flung herself upon the sand and, pillowing her golden head upon her arms, was almost instantly asleep, much as a tired little child would drop off at a moment's notice.

But Sheila, more finely tempered and higher strung, appeared to feel no weariness at all, nor any undue tension of the nerves. Her life had been replete with episodes of danger and uncertainty, and with such a temperament as she possessed, together with the flawless health and resilient strength of some wild thing—the rock pigeon, or more similarly the seal or sea otter, which the sleekness of her much suggested—a strong spice of adventure had become to her as wine and food rather than a tax upon her faculties. Like other creatures of the wild, it was perhaps a vital necessity of her nature, and, like them, she would wilt and pine in dull captivity, like that of the plantation, but come into her heritage of mind and body in such a situation as was here. It was necessary to the keenness of her condition that she use her wit and physical resistance in the combating of danger, and Ruderic could perceive by the brightness of her eyes and the faint flush of her cheeks and the free, tireless rhythm of her movements that, far from being oppressed by their surroundings, she drew exhilaration from them.

"If it were not for my anxiety about my father, I could enjoy this outing, Ruderic," she said. "It is good to get ashore in a strange, new place after being cooped up in a little ship. Look yonder. What is that unwieldy creature crawling down the beach? And there is another, and still another! Upon my word the place is swarming with them!"

Ruderic turned and scanned the broad expanse of beach.

The sun was getting lower, the fleecy clouds above their heads were flecked with gold and crimson, while the wet, glistening sands reflected broad splashes of amethyst and saffron and violet and rose. And dotting them here and there were the big, round, moving masses plodding their way to the water's edge, where the little ripples drew sweeping parabolic lines of brightest color.

"Turtles!" said Ruderic. "We have come upon their nesting-place. They have laid their eggs in the dry sand above high-water mark, and are making their way back to the sea."

"Then let us get some for our supper," said Sheila, who knew this delicacy and relished it.

She sprang to her feet, and Ruderic, emptying a sack of its supply of biscuit and charqui and yams, rose and set out with her.

They had no difficulty in following the tracks of the nearest turtle and locating its deposit. Then, there being ample for their needs in this one catch, Sheila got down upon the sand and, sitting cross-legged like an Oriental woman, looked at Ruderic, who had flung himself at length beside her.

"Do you know, Ruderic, what I most fear?" said she.

"That some of the crew betray us?" he asked. "I do not think there is any danger of that. Dirk is guarding the only Judas of the lot."

Sheila shook her head. "No, Ruderic, it is not that. Our men are faithful fellows enough, and, like savage dogs, with no small devotion to their master. The thought that torments me is this; that the buccaneers, finding themselves bottled up in their lair by the barkentine, and knowing that she is most apt to stand on and off the entrance until some consort comes to lend her aid, may assert their innocence of any wrongdoing and, in proof of their honesty, deliver our schooner, whom they will denounce as a

self-confessed pirate come in red-handed to ask for their protection."

Ruderic looked at her in dismay. "My word!" said he. "I never thought of that, but"—his face cleared a little—"there is Master Benton who may testify to our rescue of him."

"That may not be enough to save my father," Sheila answered. "What if they should reason that it was no less piracy to spoil the spoilers and run off with the goods than to seize them in the first place from their proper owners? We refused obedience to their signal to heave to, and led them upon the reef and destroyed the buccaneers and loaded their loot aboard, when, finding ourselves crippled, we ran for this nest of buccaneers and offered to divide in return for their aid in helping us escape. And we are carrying slaves. It has all the flavor of piracy, pure and simple, Ruderic, and pirates get short shrift these days. If this thing were to happen, there is grave doubt that, even my father's service to the Colonies could save him. For all we know, these buccaneers may be pursuing their lawful traffic of slaughtering and smoking beef and swine, and preparing their marrow '*route chaude*,' and will deny all knowledge or share of those whom we destroyed, which, so far as we can tell, may be the truth." She raised herself a little, then pointed seaward. "Look yonder. What boat is that?"

Ruderic, whose back was to the sea, sprang up, and, turning, saw a small craft with two sails of a rig known to sailors as a "dipping lug," which was following the barrier of reef and shoals that extended in a southwesterly direction.

"A man-of-war's cutter," said he, "and making for New Providence, some forty miles from here. They have sent for assistance to smoke out this wasp's nest."

"It is just as I have feared," said Sheila. "Do you think

that if they were really buccaneers these folk would dare assemble so near the port of Nassau? And they must have sighted this boat and guessed its errand, which will make them more than ever desirous to prove their good intention at our cost."

Ruderic sank down and stared at her, his face drawn and his brain a storm of conflicting emotions. He was forced to admit the plausibility of what her keen wit had suggested, and he scarcely knew what to feel. For if the calamity which Sheila feared should happen, then here would be the achievement in part, if not in whole, of that revenge to which his life was sworn. The mass of evidence against O'Conor was overwhelming, and, worst of all, Ruderic felt convinced that Horrocks, in his profundity of hate, and knowing himself to be a dying man whose days were numbered, would take oath that piracy was the final object for which *Hirondelle* had been built and operated. There were men among the crew who could not fail to be recognized for what they had been, whose life was forfeit for past misdeeds, and O'Conor, as captain of these, and with a mass of evidence to be furnished by the buccaneers that he had declared himself a freebooter and invoked their partnership, could scarcely hope to escape the only punishment a pirate might expect, should he "be deemed and adjudged guilty of Piracy, Felony and Robbery, and should suffer Death without Benefit of Clergy, and Loss of Lands, Goods and Chattels, as Pirates, Felons and Robbers upon the Seas ought to suffer," and that Master Benton's testimony would be disregarded.

So here now seemed the fulfillment of Ruderic's mission of hate, if Sheila were right, and his logic told him that such was the case. O'Conor was doomed to pay the penalty which he had foully contrived that Ruderic's father should innocently pay at the hands of the British.

And here the sentence would be executed by the hands of Ruderic's compatriots, Americans, for Ruderic, who first saw light on the plantation, was himself American born.

It struck in upon him with a sort of awe that at what Horrocks had gloomily proclaimed to be the hour of failure this Nemesis had now revealed itself. Horrocks had builded better than he knew. There seemed to be so curious a completion to his sinister plottings, that always had ignored whatever evil might befall himself, even to the sharing of O'Conor's doom, but which, as Ruderic well knew, had considered always some means by which Ruderic himself should escape a punitive involvement. All seemed to have befallen precisely as Horrocks had desired—O'Conor led to the gallows, and he, Horrocks, led beside him to mock him at the last and promise him a rendezvous in hell, Ruderic drawn clear of the trap, and with Sheila in his power. Precisely such had been the first and dearest vision of a ripeness of revenge to leave no feature unfulfilled.

But now, as he envisaged it, Ruderic was conscious of a devastating gloom; more than that, a sickening horror from which his soul recoiled. Far from a sense of triumph, he was conscious of a bitterness of spirit such as he had never felt before. And Sheila, watching him intently, saw this reflected in this face and, leaning forward, laid both her little hands on the back of his.

"Ruderic!" she cried, softly. "Oh, Ruderic! Do you feel it, then, as terribly as your face would seem to show? Is it possible that you no longer hate my father—and myself?"

Ruderic's anguished eyes were slowly raised and looked somberly into hers. His voice was spent and weary, as though he were fainting from the exhaustion of some terrific effort, and could scarcely muster strength to speak.

"I no longer hate your father, Sheila," said he; "and you"—a tender golden light glowed up in his eyes—"you I love better than my soul or body or—or my lifelong lust of vengeance."

He dropped his face in his hands and his big shoulders shook with choking, muffled sobs.

Chapter XXVIII

SHEILA, white as the snowy sand that had been bleached throughout the ages, waited in silence for Ruderic's paroxysm to abate. Her active mind was for the moment palsied with amazement too profound for any attempt at coherent thought. And yet, despite the fearful solicitude for her father, there were little threads of fire running through her heart, and faint, elusive strains of music in her soul.

Still Ruderic did not look up, and stronger grew the warmth and melody that permeated Sheila's being. Her fears for the future were far less than her suggestion of them would have seemed to indicate. She felt that Ruderic had exaggerated the danger of her father's position. Sheila was ready to admit the possibility that he be severely censured, and very likely as severely penalized in the matter of fines and confiscation of property, and perhaps, at worst, a period of imprisonment for which, no doubt, there might be later a reprieve.

But nothing could possibly have persuaded her that he stood in slightest danger to his neck. She knew better than did Ruderic the importance of his agency in behalf of the new nation during its struggle for independence, and the strength and power of his foreign friendships and affiliations. O'Conor had dwelt lightly on his distinguished service when telling Horrocks and Ruderic of his having rendered such. He had pledged his life and fortune to the cause of independence, and with no other security than his faith in, and high endeavor for, its vindication. Sheila knew (as Horrocks and Ruderic did not) that were O'Conor

to be led into the dock under necessity of pleading for his life, there were two or three great Frenchmen whose request was not to be refused, who, by a single word, could and would gladly make their insistent appeal in her father's behalf. In such an event it was easily possible that this offense of running slaves might be set aside as a peccadillo, and the graver charge of piracy be relegated to the limbo of many similar ones, before or since, when committed by men of great wealth, creditable past records, and friends of influence and power.

So that now Sheila found herself utterly at a loss to account for Ruderic's pitiable collapse. She could not guess that she was witnessing the breaking of a dam that up to this time had strongly held the emotions and passions of a lifetime. There was nothing to tell her that what she watched and wondered at was the disorderly retreat of a horde of devils from the tabernacle of a clean soul. Her love-laden eyes were unable to see the gargoyles which festooned his spiritual being, demons squeezing their loathsome bodies out from between the crevices of the consecrated stones of the temple.

No, to Sheila, Ruderic was at this moment merely the victim of a human weakness, and, having never previously found any weakness in him, this made him to her even the more lovable, as being a mortal man and possessed of the frailties of such. His choked, convulsive sobs aroused in her a new emotion of tenderness and that sweetest and strongest of all feminine instincts, which is the maternal. Hot on the heels of his confession of love, she found herself no longer desiring that this be continued with the ardor of a lover, but rather that she might soothe and comfort him as if he were a little boy in dire distress.

Then suddenly Ruderic let fall his hands and looked up at her, when their relative positions were reversed. For it was now Sheila who suffered the shock of the last re-

treating afterguard of Ruderic's pent-up passions, and, as if his outburst had cleared his mind, it was he who took command again.

"You must think me a blubbering fool, Sheila," said Ruderic, "but there was a reason for it. Now that I am master of myself again, I think that I had better answer that riddle which has puzzled you so long."

"As you wish, Ruderic," Sheila answered, gently; "but since you have told me that you love me and me alone, why then I do not much care what else you may or may not tell me."

"I told you that I loved you," said Ruderic, "and it is the truth. But before there can be any further talk of love between us there are a number of things that you have got to know, and when you hear them you will understand the reason for my hatred of humanity in general and Lord O'Conor in particular. But you must promise me one thing, and that is not to interrupt or speak until I've finished. Because what I have to say is not an argument, but in the nature of a deposition."

Sheila nodded. "I promise, Ruderic," said she.

So, with Sheila's violet eyes fixed upon his face with a look in which disbelief and horror raced neck and neck as the narrative went on, Ruderic told her in detail, though not with an excess of words, the story of his life's tragedy.

Sheila listened, white and tense, but, true to her agreement, did not once interrupt. When Ruderic described the treachery of Lord O'Conor and his rigging of the plot to convict his neighbor, Ruderic's father, of piracy, Sheila was at some pains to hold her compact; when Ruderic, guessing at the cause of her distress, answered her unasked question and gave the proofs, these hitherto unmentioned and being in sworn statements to Horrocks of two men involved in the affair, and the overseer of his father's plantation. This man swore likewise, that on riding from Beau-

fort one night he had been overtaken by a violent thunderstorm just before reaching the O'Conor plantation, formerly that of his master, and had taken refuge under a shelter not far from the house. While there a woman had suddenly begun to scream, and a moment later she had run out of the house, clad only in her shift, when O'Conor had followed and caught her upon the veranda and dragged her back inside. But in the vivid flash of lightning that came as they were struggling the overseer had recognized his former mistress by her tall stature and hair of ruddy gold. O'Conor also had seen him, and a moment later had come out of the house and gone to the shed and bribed the man to hold his peace. This he had done until a few years later, when, as the result of some misadventure, he had been forced to flee the Colony and had later fallen in with Horrocks, to whom he had told his story.

Ruderic did not look at Sheila during the course of his narration, but stared at the sand before his feet, while his voice was even and steady and of an almost lifeless monotone, as one who repeats an orison by rote and with the mind detached.

For while the recapitulation of his wrongs had never failed previously to stir Ruderic to the core and inspire a sort of fanatical and murderous rage, this, now, for some reason, failed of its effect. Perhaps it was because of what Horrocks had told him, and the intimation of a doubt where doubt had never hitherto existed, or perhaps he felt that, having been tricked by circumstance into a confession of his love for Sheila, he had betrayed his unholy trust and become a renegade to hatred and, though wearied by the revolt, was yet not sorry for it. For while an evil nature may feed and fatten on hatred, like a vampire on an infant's blood, so does a frank and open one finally reject it as a clean and vigorous physique would, when removed from the miasma, throw off the poisons of a tropic fever.

Sheila's face was drawn and tense when finally Ruderic concluded; this not from any conviction of her father's guilt, that she never for a moment believed, but at the shock of hearing him so accused and being forced by her agreement to remain silent and with no word in denial or defense of the black charges. It was a good thing that her self-control was strong enough to withstand such a strain, for as she listened on her mind began to clear, until at the end she found herself sufficiently contained to discuss calmly and not in hot, high-tempered refutation. She was able also to understand all that Ruderic had suffered, and to find excuse for him and feel an infinite compassion for his blighted life.

So now she leaned forward and laid her hand on the back of his.

"Tell me one thing more, Ruderic," said she, gently. "What has happened to give you this change of heart? Is it the love which you profess to feel for me?"

Ruderic shook his head. "No, Sheila," he answered. "That might have been enough to keep me from the part of my revenge that concerns yourself, but not the exacting of it from your father."

Sheila smiled bitterly. "Well then, Ruderic," said she, "your vengeance on me could have been no great one in any case, because if I believed my father guilty of this thing I would not have blamed you, and would have been quite ready to pay whatever penalty you might exact of me, so that it would have been no revenge at all. And if I did not believe him guilty, but still believed you held him so, why, then I could scarcely have blamed you any more; and, loving you as I do, there could have been no great satisfaction to you in my atonement. But, Ruderic"—she leaned forward and, dropping her hands upon his shoulders, forced him to meet the directness of her gaze—"this thing is manifestly impossible. There has been some aw-

ful mistake. That terrible old man has been the victim of a fatal error. He has been foully and, I much fear, willingly deceived."

"How can you know that?" Ruderic muttered. "Only yesterday you witnessed an example of your father's cold ruthlessness—when he would have flung overboard the poor, black slaves."

Sheila nodded. "I confess that was a shock and a surprise," said she. "And again this morning when he disarmed the buccaneer commander, then slew him with as little mercy as one might kill a rabid beast. But you must remember that my father has had his training in a hard and bitter school. I admit also his avarice, and, while I cannot believe him to be capable of sending an honest man unjustly to the scaffold in order to acquire his estates, I will admit the possibility of his having tried merely to drive your father from the place for such a purpose, and possibly having overreached himself. But this I do know, never would he have treated your mother as you say."

"How can you be so sure?" demanded Ruderic.

"Because I know my father's nature in whatever has to do with such a part of it. It is cold in all that concerns women. I have known the most alluring of them to pay him court in vain, and the leopard does not change his spots."

Ruderic thought of what Horrocks had said, and the voicing of two dawning doubts and the musing statement, "Once a libertine always a libertine."

"He was then still young, not yet thirty, and it might have been the great passion of his life."

Sheila shook her head. "My mother was that," said she, "and he was at this time passionately in love with her. She was a French girl of New Orleans. She died at giving me birth, and he has mourned her from that time to this and has remained faithful to her memory. And"—

she leaned suddenly forward—"I happen to know that it was not your mother whom that overseer saw. It was my own." And the crimson suddenly flooded her face and her eyes fell to the sand in shame and humiliation.

"But he had not yet married!"

"That is true," murmured Sheila, "and you may understand, Ruderic, the pain it gives me to tell you this of the mother whom I never knew. Her father, an exiled *émigré* of the nobility, hated my father and distrusted him, holding him an adventurer of no principle. My father prevailed upon her to flee with him, and, though they were married later, at the time of which you speak they had just arrived at the plantation."

"How do you know this?" Ruderic demanded.

"I learned it in France from my mother's sister, who came to see me at the convent. She hated my father for his act, and sought to revenge herself upon him in this way through me. My mother was possessed of some inborn dread of thunderstorms, and in the course of them became distraught. So you may be sure, Ruderic, that your own mother played no part in all that you have told me. And if that is all a fearful lie, then why not the rest of it?"

Ruderic buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"God help me, Sheila," said he (and inconsistently enough, since a helpful God had occupied no place in Horrocks's teachings), "I began to fear it is!"

"But why fear it, Ruderic?" cried Sheila. "Why not hope for it with all your heart and soul? Aside from this, as you thought, just cause, you have no reason nor desire to hate my father."

"I think of the wrong I may have done him," muttered Ruderic, and added, with a cry of desperation: "Consider his position at this moment. He stands in the shadow of the gallows! If the buccaneers deliver him over to the man-of-war, as you most justly fear, I do not think any

past record of his can save him. And Horrocks will swear to his guilt, though it means a like penalty to himself. This is all of our doing, Sheila—Horrocks's (who is not my uncle) and my own. We have dug this pit for him, and now, just when both of us begin to have our doubts, he has fallen into it."

Sheila shook her head. "You do not know my father as well as I," said she. "He is a subtle man, and has more than one sheet anchor."

But Ruderic was unconvinced. He was still staring moodily at the sand when suddenly his meditation was rudely disturbed.

For there came from behind the dunes, at no great distance, where Dirk had remained in watchful guard of Yellow Jack, a wild yell, followed instantly by the sound of Dirk's voice uplifted in a roaring oath, and an instant later a piercing scream from May.

Chapter XXIX

RUDERIC whipped up upon his feet, snatching for his musket as he rose. His mind, more alert for action than for the devious paths of argument and dark intrigue, leaped instantly to the close estimate of what had happened.

Some prowling party of buccaneers, come to the place, perhaps, in quest of turtles and their eggs, had blundered on their trail in the loose sand and followed it. Or, knowing where the big amphibians were wont to nest, they might have fallen haphazard on the spot. Still again, some lookout with his spyglass had seen their debarkation, when a party had been sent to take them prisoners.

"Stop you here," said Ruderic to Sheila. "Hide behind a dune and wait," and he began to run back swiftly as he could through the deep sand. Then, coming around a hummock where Dirk and Yellow Jack had been, his eyes fell upon a startling spectacle.

Dirk, who had scrambled to his feet and drawn his cutlass, was stoutly and savagely resisting the attack of three hairy ruffians, dirty and unkempt, with smocks stained from the dried blood that was a part of the insignia of buccaneers. These sought to cut him down, albeit with a certain caution inspired of his bulk and the ferocity with which he met their onslaught. He was standing with stout, bare legs astraddle of the firearms, of which he had been unable to avail himself in the swift unexpectedness of the assault. A few paces off stood Yellow Jack, unarmed and the blood welling over his malignant face from a cut above the eye. Some distance beyond him May Benton, sud-

denly roused from her sleep, sat with both hands raised to her temples, her golden hair cascading over her shoulders, while beside her stood a meager, smooth-shaven man in stained and shabby black *soutane* and cassock of a priest.

At sight of Ruderic, Yellow Jack stooped low and ran in stealthy fashion around behind the back of Dirk, who was slashing and thrusting in a steady flow of lurid deep-sea oaths. Ruderic, some fifty yards away, and scenting treachery, dared not risk a shot for fear of hitting Dirk, who, unmindful of Yellow Jack, and unable to turn when so hotly beset, managed at this moment to get home a blow that sent one of his assailants staggering backward with a crimson stream welling from his chest. He lurched forward as he did so, when Yellow Jack, watchful of his opportunity, crouched lower still and snatched a pistol, the nearest weapon to his hand.

Then the scoundrel must have lost his head, for, instead of emptying the firearm into the broad back of Dirk and snatching another, he turned and leveled it at Ruderic, who, as he did so, threw up his musket and pulled the trigger, risking a misshot in the crisis. But something was wrong with the priming, for the gun missed fire.

Yellow Jack took a pace or two forward, then paused, a wolfish smile upon his evil face. Ruderic had failed to provide himself with other weapon than the musket and his cutlass, and, holding him at his short mercy, as he thought, Yellow Jack gave a shrill cackle of malevolent laughter.

“Now here’s a score to settle, young marster,” said he, “and no loose flints underfoot. This is my wedding night, and here come the villagers. Not Mistress May, my cook. She’s for the brave brotherhood. Your own pretty pigeon shall be served on toast for Yellow Jack.” And, covering Ruderic squarely at a distance of ten paces, he pulled the trigger.

Now, in the course to be expected of such events, here would have been an end to Ruderic, and one far worse for Sheila and May Benton. Yellow Jack had boasted, with a certain truth, that he was known in previous years as the best knife-fighter in Vera Cruz, where he had been bravo and bully, crimp and tout of dives and ill-famed boarding houses whence many a drunken sailor had been shanghaied or drugged to death and robbed and the corpse flung to feed shark or cayman. And if a handy man with his knife, whether to thrust or throw it, he knew his skill to be no less with the pistol; and, with so good an arm as that gripped in his tawny talons, he counted Ruderic no better than already dead.

But there is this difference in fighting men, that some depend alone on bone and brawn and brute animal force and courage, like brave, mistaken Dirk, an honest lad gone wrong. But others of higher caste and more mentality fight always with their heads, and, no matter how great their strength and skill, the thought is ever parent to the act. For them is no berserker rage or the frenzy of the Moslem or other fanatic. The greater the stress the cooler the discipline of mind and the body's obedience to this. Such men live longer in epochs of strife and become the leaders of it, and, though there may be those who fight and run away and live to fight another day, the proverb, like most of its sort, is a sophistry; because the history of wars proves that more men are killed running than fighting, which is to say, in a great rout or disorderly retreat than in a pitched battle.

Ruderic, by virtue of his caste, possessed in full the imagination of the warrior, which is a thought ahead of that of his base-born adversary. Wherefore, anticipating the contraction of Yellow Jack's finger on the trigger, but not too soon, he flung himself head foremost, downward and to the side, the mortal fraction of a second before the

weapon barked. The heavy ball whirred over him with some inches to spare and put to flight a platoon of pelicans drilling at the water's edge.

But if Ruderic's faculties were swift, then were those of Yellow Jack not greatly the more sluggish by virtue of his long experience in sudden fatal brawls where the victory is not awarded to him who strikes the strongest blow, but the quickest.

Even as his finger pressed the trigger, strongly enough to fire the pistol, yet too strongly to release it in time, he knew that he had missed. He flung it aside and reached in his sash for the knife that such as he are never without, cunningly concealed in a fold, but which he had been saving for whatever survivor might remain when the mêlée was over, whether Ruderic or Dirk or a buccaneer or two or the defenseless priest.

For Yellow Jack was an opportunist of sorts, and believer in the principle of the dragon's teeth—one that has gone far to colonize the world—and he did not see the use of sharing booty or beauty when this could be avoided with no great risk to the surface of his own saffron skin.

Now that he had failed, the presence of mind, stamped for the instant at sight of the man he feared above all other men, returned. As Ruderic scrambled up, unscathed and gripping the head of his hanger to cut down this double traitor, Yellow Jack spun about in his tracks and, running half bent, in the venomous fashion of his kind, was at the back of Dirk before the doughty ex-pirate and man-of-war's man had any knowledge of a flank attack. Ruderic's warning shout to him was disregarded, or at least he was too late to act upon it. Dirk thrust through one of the pair left to oppose him and, even as he recovered from his lunge, was stabbed himself foully and from behind.

The knife of Yellow Jack, striking with the venomous accuracy of a rattler's fangs, found its sheath just under the rim of Dirk's left shoulder-blade, where, deflected by the heavy muscles and a rib, it missed the heart by a scant margin, while yet inflicting a mortal wound. Dirk swayed, gave out a choking bellow, then crashed down like some great Spanish bull to the sands of the arena under the fatal, if faulty, stroke of the *espada*.

He was prone as Ruderic reached the spot, where space was made for him by Yellow Jack, who, knife in hand, fell back to give him way. The remaining buccaneer, a stupid fellow, yet courageous, made panting effort to parry Ruderic's furious lunge, then sank down sobbing, run cleanly through the heart. Yellow Jack, observing this, turned suddenly and fled straight up the beach on the wet, glistening sands that, from their very fineness, had settled and packed as hard as a sawn-out slab of coral rock. And Ruderic, pausing for an instant to tighten his belt, set after him.

The ancient sailor proverb, "Jack ashore is a poor runner," did not apply to this yellow specimen of the breed. Perhaps, in his confused genealogy, there may have been some early strain of Aztec courier, the race which, working in relays, brought its fresh fish to the Montezumas from the sea to the plateau of Tereochtitlan, five thousand feet above its level, before the tropic heat had time to mar their freshness.

Yellow Jack was spare and sinewy of frame, with thin but bulging calves, and thighs that had the spring of the rump of an antelope. Strong drink was not among his darker vices, and the *cigaritos* that he smoked were mild and had not gone far to impair the action of his heart and lungs. There was but one factor in his disfavor, which was his age. But as he put off with springy stride, in a race of which he knew the prize to be his life, he may have

felt that this could be offset by the square and stalwart bulk of his pursuer.

Ruderic was very broad of shoulder, heavy of bone, average of stature, but overmuscled for one of his years. He realized now, as he gave chase to Yellow Jack, that his endeavor must be a good deal like a heavy, clumsy lion whelp chasing a jackal across the sands of the Sahara. If Yellow Jack, who must have had nearly threescore years to his credit, though but slightly grizzled about the ears and muzzle, were happily to be seized with a vertigo, then might Ruderic hope to catch him, but he could not, for the life of him, see how else.

A lean dog for a long chase, thought Ruderic as he held on stubbornly down the beach, doing his best to keep from being immediately outdistanced, and yet not find himself spent at the end of the first few furlongs. Like most youngsters of solid frame, Ruderic had never greatly indulged in running sports, nor, for that matter, in sports of any kind, though he had been trained in boxing and wrestling and fencing, at which, by virtue of his massive strength, he naturally excelled. But there was this about him—if not swift on his legs, these were as tireless as those of a beagle or lurcher, and he felt that he had every hope of running Yellow Jack to earth if only he could manage to keep him in sight and the chase was uninterrupted.

This last was what Ruderic most feared. His determination to clip the scoundrel at any cost was not entirely one of revenge for the foul taunts and treacherous deathblow dealt poor Dirk. Their lives, and for the maidens even more, depended on Yellow Jack's suppression before able to get in touch with the buccaneers, and, as Ruderic swung doggedly after him, on sands so hard packed as to leave scarcely a trace of footprints, he wondered how Yellow Jack could hope to accomplish this. He could not

know where the buccaneers had left their boat. He might take to the water and swim, being, no doubt, amphibious like most of his breed, but in that case Ruderic had some hope of catching him if the start was not too far ahead, for he could swim like a seal. Or Yellow Jack might hold straight on to the head of the harbor and cross there on the shoals, wading and swimming in spots. This would mean, Ruderic feared, a chase of several miles, if he were not soon left behind so far as to relinquish it.

But, as they sped on and Ruderic began to settle into his second wind and run with greater comfort, it grew plain to him that his quarry, having proved to his satisfaction his supremacy of foot, now desired to decoy his pursuer on after him. For Yellow Jack looked back occasionally as if to gauge the intervening distance and keep it of even space, and when, presently, to test him, Ruderic slowed to a walk, so also did Yellow Jack. They were separated by about three hundred yards, so that even if, in starting, Ruderic had paused to grab up a pistol, he could scarcely have hoped to bark the fellow.

The sun was getting very low, and as the tropic night falls, directly on its setting, with no afterglow as in a northern clime, it occurred to Ruderic that it was Yellow Jack's intention to decoy him on until the darkness fell, when, under cover of it, he might hope to circle and, speeding back to the spot whence the chase had started, possess himself of firearms, then turn hunter himself and finish the business without assistance from the buccaneers. And presently Ruderic was convinced that such was the scoundrel's crafty design.

For Yellow Jack broke into a run again, then turned off sharply to the right and took to the hummock lands, when Ruderic, mindful that he must not let himself be led too far away, set after him at an equal pace, but keeping well between him and the spot which they had left.

Here the going was heavy, for the sand was deep and soft, with patches of broom and scrub palmetto, thigh deep, which presently proved a factor in favor of the slower dog. Speed was impossible under such conditions, and Ruderic was the younger and more untiring of the pair. To test his quarry he began presently to accelerate his pace, and discovered that he was shortening the lead a little; though, whether or not Yellow Jack permitted this, he could not be sure.

They ran on for a mile or two, in which time Ruderic discovered that Yellow Jack was no longer circling, but holding straight across the neck in direction of the harbor. Perhaps he was not sure as to the mortality of the knife-thrust dealt to Dirk, and feared that, even were he to make a burst of speed and get back to the starting place ahead of Ruderic, it might be only to receive a bullet for his prize, or, reckoning on the mettle of Sheila, may have feared to find her able to defend herself. At any rate, whatever the reasoning of his furtive mind, he held straight on until presently the chase led over a low ridge and Ruderic saw, not half a mile ahead, the gleaming waters of the lagoon around which they had passed on their way across the neck of land. And at the same moment he became convinced that Yellow Jack had missed his calculations and, what was of more importance, that he was beginning to tire. He kept looking back over his shoulder every minute or two, and as Ruderic, scarcely suffering at all from fatigue, now raised the pace, slogging along with the obstinate endurance of a basset hound, Yellow Jack spurted for the distance of a hundred yards or so, and then began to lag again. The chances are that it was long since the fellow had so used his legs and that he reckoned the service to be found in them from recollections of a span of years before, and without pausing to consider that age will tell. In a word, he had committed

the fatal error of so many older men who engage upon a physical test with their youngers, the overestimation of their powers of endurance, and forgetful of the fact that youth must be served.

A glow of triumph welled up in Ruderic's strong and steady pulses, and, for the first time since the singular pursuit began, he felt that he was going to win. Yellow Jack had committed a fatal error in not profiting by his greater speed and the perfect track conditions of the firm beach to lose his pursuer at the start, to make first sure of his own safety, and then by devious ways to seek the accomplishment of his sinister desires.

But it was now too late. He was tiring fast, and close behind him plodded a Nemesis as inexorable as the grim Reaper with his scythe. So, like many hunted creatures who, exultant in their greater swiftness, seek first to beguile and tantalize the heavy-footed hound, until they find to their dismay that, despite their greatest effort, he is drawing in upon them, Yellow Jack turned to another element in his desperate effort to escape. As Ruderic suspected, the man could swim like a barracuda, and the mouth of the lagoon where it opened on the bay was directly in his path.

Ruderic, from a slight elevation, could see by the fading colors in the water that it was not very deep, the bottom appearing to be formed in pools and shallows, with scattered patches of coral, and that it might be crossed by wading and swimming alternately. He did not think there could be danger of sharks, as these monsters are wont to scull out with the tide. It struck him also that perhaps Yellow Jack had counted on finding the buccaneers' boat there. Then, as the whole line of the beach came in sight, this hope proved to be well founded, though, as Ruderic perceived immediately, it was not destined to serve the purpose of Yellow Jack.

The ebbing tide had left grounded, some fifty yards above the water's edge—for the slope was gradual to flatness—a small whaleboat which four men might easily have slid down afloat, but which task must obviously prove beyond the strength of a single one. Yellow Jack seemed to cast a despairing glance in its direction, then, realizing its mockery, ran down across the beach and splashed out into the water until, waist deep, he flung himself forward upon his side and began to swim with long and powerful strokes. Two hundred yards behind, Ruderic took the water after him.

Here again Yellow Jack appeared to increase his lead. He swam across a pool, grounded on the other side, and waded several paces, thigh deep, to the next basin. He was halfway across this when Ruderic's ears were startled by a piercing scream. It was not such a cry as might have been expected from a man, but shrill and agonizing, like the screech of a woman in mortal agony, and as it quavered off into a strangling squawk, Ruderic saw that the water was in a turmoil and that Yellow Jack had turned and seemed to be straining back in his direction.

Then a great glistening and writhing tentacle lashed suddenly in air in horrid convolutions, the sunset glowing on it crimsonly as it wove above the struggling wretch like a mammoth whip. So close was Ruderic that he could see the round disks resembling the pale ulcers of a leper throughout its length. It fell snakily, circling round and round its victim, even to his face. Yellow Jack flung an arm in air, and immediately another tentacle was wrapped round it and drew it down. Head and shoulders disappeared. There were some oily undulations, small sucking eddies, and then the bland water, blackened with sepia, lay flat and dark and stagnant as a pool of ink.

Chapter XXX

COLD with horror, his flesh crawling in fearful anticipation of every stroke, Ruderic squattered shoreward and, stumbling up the beach, flung himself down to lie for several minutes in a state of nerveless collapse. He was exhausted from his efforts, but this was a trifle compared to the numbing paralysis of the ghastly scene just witnessed. It seemed to him that the devil, tired of waiting for Yellow Jack, had sent his own "fish," to garner him.

But here was no time to be indulged in shakes and shudders. So Ruderic sprang up, drew his breath deeply, and stood for a moment looking out across the harbor where, over the end of the sandspit opposite, he could see the spars of the vessels at anchor off the camp of the buccaneers, and, among these, he readily distinguished the tall mainmast of *Hirondelle*, and the mainsail not yet lowered. She was a matter of some three or four miles distant but from higher up the beach it seemed to him that she must lie no more than two or three furlongs off shore.

As the chase, which had terminated in so terrible yet satisfactory a manner, had taken the course of the two sides of a triangle, Ruderic was not far from its starting point. Desperately anxious about his charges, left with a dying man and a priest of sorts about the character of whom there must be considerable doubt, Ruderic tightened his belt and set off at a dogtrot to return.

His strength revived as he ran along and, his course

being truly laid, he struck presently their trail where they had crossed the neck; then, just as night was falling, came suddenly upon the others.

Here a sad tableau was presented. Sheila, seated on the sand, was holding in her lap the head of Dirk and, from the labored movements of his chest, Ruderic saw that the brave fellow still lived. The priest, kneeling at his side, seemed listening to his confession, or exhorting him to make such, while May Benton, likewise kneeling on the other side, appeared to be at prayer. The bodies of the three dead buccaneers had been drawn to a little distance and lay side by side, their members straightened but with hands clasped across their chests, and on those of each were small crosses roughly fashioned of twigs, the stalks of the palmetto.

Ruderic hurried to the spot and flung himself down beside the dying man. Sheila's pale face turned to him questioningly.

"Yellow Jack is dead," muttered Ruderic. "I ran him into the water, and in swimming out he was taken by a kraken—a devil fish—and Dirk?"

Dirk's head turned slowly at sound of what was no doubt the only voice he loved; a tired smile struggled to his lips. "Dirk be battenin' 'is 'atches for the larst run, Marster Ruderic," he whispered, then turned his heavy eyes toward the priest. "I'll 'eave ahead, Father, now that Marster Ruderic is 'ere. Don't 'appen to 'ave a drop o' spirits, do you, sir?" he whispered.

Ruderic bethought him of a flask of brandy in his kit. He mixed the spirits with some water in a gourd and held it to Dirk's lips. "'Ere she goes, sir," whispered Dirk, drained the gourd in thirsty gulps, then gave a sigh. Sheila indicated the priest to Ruderic.

"This is Father Ignatius, Ruderic," said she, "of the Brotherhood of Jesus. He was taken prisoner by the

buccaneers some years ago, and has since chosen to work for the redemption of their souls."

Ruderic inclined his head. "Then poor Dirk is done for," he murmured.

"Aye, that be I, marster," said Dirk, in a stronger voice from the passing stimulation of his draught, "and far better an end than e'er I could 'ave 'oped for, and one which 'is Reverence tells me may go far to wipe ofr the slate of past misdeeds."

"You had better now confess, my son," said the priest gently and in English but slightly accented.

"Scant time for more than the worst of it, Father," muttered Dirk. "I confess to 'avin' committed all the deadly sins and then some many I 'aven't tried keep track of. But," he roused himself a little, "there's one as has laid 'eavy on my 'eart these many years. For mind you, sirs, there do be men's sins such as a stout lad might commit in the flush of 'eat and passion, and there do be slinkin', craven sins such as come to 'aunt im when the slush-lamps are burnin' low and the ship a wallerin' on the calm afore a 'urricane, and corposants a glowin' and a wavin' on the yards'-ends. This was a deed that sent a brave and innocent man to a shameful death upon the gallers, and 'is name, Captain John Wyndham, gentleman, come to the Colonies for the betterin' of his fortune, and he was owner of the plantation which is now the property of my lord O'Conor, the father of my lady," and he turned his heavy eyes to Sheila.

Ruderic was conscious of a bristling beneath the back of his sodden shirt. "What's all this, Dirk?" he asked, gently, and looked at Sheila, whose white face had turned suddenly toward him.

"Old 'ard, Marster Ruderic, and let me finish while I may," said Dirk. "Lord O'Conor had naught to do with the rotten business. 'Twas cooked up by Redbeard outer

revenge on Captain Wyndham, whom 'e had misled into a partnership o' sorts for a venture which the Captain 'e thort was the seekin' of gold on the Isthmus of Darien, but which, in all fact, was no more than rank piracy and the takin' and lootin' of a Spanish town there."

Dirk's voice began to grow thick and his words disjointed and incoherent. "We got the worst of it, chased out—gnawin' our boot tops afore we'd made the river mouth. Captain Wyndham, learnin' what was what, would 'ave no further traffic with Redbeard—so we warped her out and made sail again—and in the Florida Straits fell in with a British ship and pillaged her. Then back we come to the plantation, Redbeard gnawin' his flamin' whiskers and swearin' to cook Captain Wyndham's goose or know the reason w'y. We 'ad booty no lack—and Redbeard was flush with good English gold. He bribed two, or was it three, of my lord O'Conor's indentured men to give false testimony, and some of us he bribed, and I, honest Dirk Tompkins, was one of them. Then he seized Captain Wyndham's wherry and charged her with some of the loot, and corrupted the two 'ands aboard. 'E played his cards well, did Redbeard, w'o was sane enough and no madman, as some claim, save only in 'is cups."

Sheila laid her hand upon his chest. "And Master Horrocks, Dirk?" she whispered.

Dirk made a gesture as if to brush his hand across his eyes, but failed from lack of strength. "'E wasn't Master Horrocks then, my lady. 'E 'ad naught to do with it, nor did he know that I was sailin' that time with Redbeard. I thought like all the other lads that Captain Wyndham had let us down, nor did I know my error till 'e was dead and Redbeard was dead, and most of the other blackguards o' that crew."

He began to wander so that they could pick up no more

than fragments of the tragic story here and there. The Jesuit, who may have sensed that some fearful secret was lying just beneath the surface, made no effort to interfere in the discharge of his sacred office. Dirk paused to complain of thirst when Ruderic assuaged it as before, then sought eagerly to extract further information on that which so vitally concerned him. But this time the rally was of short duration. "And what part did Lord O'Conor play?" asked Ruderic.

"I tell ye, marster," whispered Dirk faintly, "that O'Conor had naught to do with it. 'Twas all of Redbeard's plottin' for 'is revenge and 'is 'ate, and I, like others he bought, was party to it. Later a man I met in Mobile—or was it New Orleans?—told me that Captain Wyndham's lady had died there of the fever some months after 'is 'angin'. Well, sirs," he gripped the gourd and made an effort to rise, when the Jesuit, scanning narrowly his face, leaned down to administer the final rites.

"'Ere she goes south, mateys all," said Dirk, and fell back dead.

The devoted Jesuit recited his prayer for the passing soul, by now become a routine task for him, and performed in the perfunctory fashion of one who, while hoping for the best, would still prepare this flitting spirit for the worst. He knew little of Dirk that was good, save that he had died in the discharge of his duty (which is a deal when all is said and done), and by Dirk's own confession there was a long score to the debit side of his life's log book. Then, his office concluded, the priest pronounced a benediction for those who had assisted at it, turned to Ruderic and asked, in a melancholy voice:—"And what now is there to be done for the safety and comfort of these ladies, sir?"

Even in the turmoil of mind which was the result of Dirk's confession, Ruderic's thought had centered on this

very problem. The buccaneers' boat on the shore of the lagoon had suggested one solution which he had considered while making his way back to the camping place, but the practicability of this had depended perforce on the honesty and disposition of the priest, whether friendly or inimical. It rested also to a considerable extent upon his abilities as boatman. Being now in great measure assured as to the first of these qualities, Ruderic answered:

"The welfare of the ladies must depend greatly on the assistance which you may be willing and able to render them, Father." He looked at Sheila. "Have you explained the nature of our position to his Reverence?"

"I have been thoroughly informed, sir," said the Jesuit, "and profoundly regret that my own influence with these savage men is not enough to promise you any protection. The proof of that is here . . ." he made a melancholy gesture toward the lifeless figures. "My presence is no more than tolerated by the buccaneers for the sake of such offices as these. Living, they pay no heed to me; dying, they gain some comfort from my presence."

"How did your party happen to find us here?" Ruderic asked. "Did they see us land?"

Father Ignatius shook his head. "We came here early in the day, and had no knowledge of your vessel's entrance. The object of our visit was to search for turtles' eggs, and the amphibians themselves, so the men brought no firearms, never expecting to find game worth the hunting on this strip of sand. But on our way across to the beach we came upon the tracks of cattle leading to the south, and followed them to see if we might locate the herd, and so doing to send back two men for guns. But the tracks must have been very old, and after following them for two or three miles without success we turned back this way and came upon your party quite by hazard."

"And did the buccaneers attack without warning or parley?" asked Ruderic.

"Yes," said the Jesuit, in his melancholy tones. "They consider castaways to be their prey, and the sight of a lovely maid maddened them. Your brave, if misguided, bo'sun was sitting with his back turned to us, and if I had called out to warn him my cloth would not have saved my throat. . . . The other man saw us, and most treacherously signaled his support of the buccaneers. He engaged Dirk in conversation as they crept up on him, but in spite of this they failed to strike him down before he sensed their presence. Some angel must have warned him, for he whirled about in the nick of time to meet the rush and stem it. The rest you saw."

Ruderic nodded, then asked, abruptly: "Do you know how to sail a boat, Father?"

The priest gave his weary, mournful smile. "That ability is about all I have been able to accomplish during my sojourn with these folk," said he.

"That now may be the means of saving two innocent lives," said Ruderic, "because I should be tempted to slay my charges with my own hand rather than see them taken by the buccaneers. As soon as this new moon sets we had best put them aboard your boat, when you must make for New Providence. There is a little night breeze from the northeast which will be a fair wind, and, as the tide is making, you should be able to cross the shoals at the harbor's head and follow the line of reefs. The chances are that you will fall in with some vessel coming to the assistance of the barkentine."

"But you, Ruderic?" asked Sheila, quickly.

"I shall get back aboard the schooner, if I have to swim," said Ruderic, quietly. "My duty is to render what aid I may be able to the man whom I have mortally wronged, or to share his fate. Master Horrocks must

learn of his wicked error, which has led to all of this, and we must both make what poor atonement we may be able for its fatal consequences."

"And what can you possibly hope to accomplish by that?" cried Sheila, protestingly.

"At the very least," Ruderic answered, doggedly, "we can make our oaths that we compelled your father against his will to disobey the signals to heave to, and lure the barkentine across the reef, and then seek aid from the buccaneers."

"I do not think that they will grant him such," said Father Ignatius. "They are not here for any unlawful traffic which could be proven, but to hold a sort of market, and while the bulk of the merchandise may have been dishonestly acquired at the start, yet after much changing of hands it would be difficult to prove the guilt of any thief. Nevertheless, I doubt that the barkentine would risk running into a trap, alone and unsupported, especially with a part of her crew gone to summon aid."

"Such is my own opinion," Ruderic agreed, "and you are most apt to meet this aid upon your way."

"But you are not to make this useless sacrifice, Ruderic!" cried Sheila. "You are not to blame for the wicked error of that terrible old man."

"I must obey the dictates of my conscience and my honor in the matter, Sheila," Ruderic answered, in a tone which admitted of no argument. "But there is a good deal which I should like to say to you alone before we part."

"Come, then," said Sheila, and, with a slight bow to the priest, she turned and walked slowly back among the dunes.

Chapter XXXI

OUT of sight and earshot of Father Ignatius and May, Sheila sank down in the deep sand and motioned Ruderic to sit beside her.

There was, by this time, no lingering daylight and there was a murkiness to the warm, viscid air which gave promise of a dark night once the new moon was quenched in the sea. There was still a faint pervasive glimmer to render surrounding objects visible enough, but elusive of dimensions and perspective. A sinister witchery lay on the place to give it a lack of substance and reality, as though it were of some alien plane of matter, the dim and dreary terrain of such a dream as comes to depress the sleeping mind of one in whom fatigue may banish active worry for an interval.

Sheila turned her face to Ruderic, and in the murk it seemed to him that her eyes had gathered and concentrated in them all the dimly diffused light, in the fashion of precious gems, which have the faculty to gather and then diffuse such rays as are existent, like a blue diamond. Her *matte* face held also its share of this subtle radiance, and made a squarely oval note against the dimmer background of the white sand-hill.

"What have you to tell me, Ruderic?" she murmured. "Hold nothing back, my dear, for it is very possible that after we part to-night we may never meet again in this world." She drew a little dagger from her girdle, and it shone with a lambent gleam. "You would not have to slay me as you just said, although I vow I should like that better. When first I went to the plantation I was never

quite free from the fear that some day I might be thoughtless enough to stray too far alone, and find myself suddenly confronted and my retreat cut off, by some fugitive black, or devilish white renegade for that matter. So I prevailed upon my father confessor to grant me a dispensation, should such a horror occur."

Ruderic's heart swelled. "Nothing could sully your pure soul, Sheila," said he.

"Well now, Ruderic, I purpose to shield its earthly envelope while this is living, also," said Sheila, quietly. "So you may put your mind at rest on that score. Still, life has become very sweet in these last few hours," she added, naively, "and we must both do our best to safeguard it if only for the sake of the other."

"Sheila," muttered Ruderic, "how are you able to forgive me for the awful wrong that I have done you and your father?"

"Why, as for that, Ruderic," Sheila answered brightly, "it is never difficult to forgive where one dearly loves, and these many months you have had the whole of my heart. So if you love me, dear, as now I know you do, then take me in your arms . . . and hold me close, close, close . . . and kiss me on the lips . . . and . . ." She swayed against him and her arms stole up and round his neck. His own went out to clasp her supple, pliant body, and as her fragrant lips were crushed to his there seemed to be some amazing fusion, which was not only of their physical beings but a spiritual commingling, as though they had suddenly become a single entity which swam with exquisite giddiness in a rosy, boundless sea of pure delight.

The exponent of this dazzling new creature found expression in the melting lips which, remaining parted and pliant and mobile, seemed able while strongly crushed to murmur passionate endearments, that slipped between them in fluttering fragments. Their terms were not new,

nor have they ever grown old, and their refrain was that timeless, changeless song:—"I love, I desire . . . I yield . . . I give, I take, we love, and loving, what else matters?"

This thrilling ecstasy seemed to endure interminably and with a clashing of other senses that now peured in from every side to claim their share. Sheila's lips, from which her soft murmurings poured, were like a gurgling fruit, avidly crushed to those of one long tormented by insatiable thirst. He felt that if they were to be slain at that moment by a single, sweeping blow, nothing could hinder their throbbing on through all eternity.

They loosed each other, and at arms length, continued to patter their pledges and promises. Perhaps the most redoubtable of passions is whetted by being enveloped in mortal danger, that just passed and that which looms directly ahead. To fight and kill, then love, then fight and kill again, must have at least this much to justify it, that it appears to be the history of the ages in every phase of animal existence. It has this warrant, that to love without fighting is to get something for nothing, and to fight without loving is to get nothing for something, either condition, as we must all perforce agree, to be incomplete.

Their rationality beginning presently to assert itself, Sheila rested quietly in Ruderic's arms as if trying to sort and stow the different articles of her love-consignment, a precious freight. Ruderic rather more than top-heavy with his own was near to being capsized by what she then propounded. For looking up into his face she gave her low, thrilling laugh, and said, in the tone of one who proposes the taking of a jaunt afoot or mounted:—

"Now, Ruderic, sweetheart, I have something to suggest, and you must promise to humor me."

Ruderic thought he guessed at what was coming. "I promise you anything, my own darling, so long as it goes

with duty and honor. But if you wish me to turn my back on your father and make off with you in the boat, then that I shall not do."

Sheila laughed again and pressed her cheek against his chest. "I do not, Ruderic," said she. "I am no fond, faint-hearted village girl who prefers a live husband to a dead lover, no matter at what cost to his manhood. You are right. You must get back aboard *Hirondelle*. But I don't want you to swim. Think of the devilfish and sharks and caymans and stingarees and other horrid monsters."

"I can scarcely walk out to her," Ruderic answered, "and there is only the one boat. I would not risk having you seen, so I shall just have to take my chance. I do not really think there is great danger. That devilfish was placed there by his Patron.

Sheila crossed herself. "Now, Ruderic," said she, "with all that is ripe to happen within the next few hours, there is little risk of danger from any of the buccaneers coming to this spot. We have supplies a-plenty, what with the turtle eggs besides, so why not leave us here and take the boat and go out to the schooner to do whatever you may be able?"

Ruderic shook his head. "No," said he, "I shall swim out to her, and there's an end of it. The water must be very shallow up there at the head of the harbor, and the distance will not be great. So if that is your request, then, sweetheart, I must regretfully refuse to grant it."

Sheila nestled closer. "I confess I had not any great hope that you would, and that is not my request, sir. I ask a favor which cannot in any way conflict with your honor, your duty, nor your pride."

"Then if it falls within those conditions, it is granted," Ruderic answered.

Sheila freed herself from his arms and, sitting suddenly

upright, cupped her mouth with her hands. "Father Ignatius . . ." she called, in a low but carrying voice; "May, will you both please to come here?"

"What's this?" asked Ruderic.

Sheila gave a low, mischievous laugh. "Wait and see, sir," said she.

The Jesuit and May, surprised at the summons, quickly approached. Sheila sprang up and Ruderic did likewise, wondering what might be Sheila's caprice.

"Father," said Sheila, "Master Ruderic . . . or to give him his proper title, Ruderic Wyndham, by birth a citizen of the United States of America, and I, Sheila O'Conor, also American born, have discovered . . . or, to be more accurate, confessed that we love each other as dearly and truly as seems to be humanly possible."

The good priest started to murmur some congratulatory words, but Sheila interrupted with a word of acknowledgment. "The point is this, Father," said she. "You and Mistress May and I are about to embark on a voyage of some danger, while Ruderic stubbornly insists on running his neck back into the snare. We cannot tell what may be the outcome of the adventure, but I am of the conviction that if anything should happen to interrupt the earthly course of Ruderic's love and mine we would be far more certain of finding ourselves united in the world to come if we were to be joined in holy wedlock."

Ruderic gave a gasp, but before he could speak Sheila laid her hand upon his lips. "I have your promise, dear," said she, "so there is nothing at all for you to say. For us to be married here and now by Father Ignatius cannot in any way do damage to your duty and honor."

"But . . . your father," muttered Ruderic, his brain a-whirl.

"Now, Ruderic," said Sheila, "you know how he has been flinging me at your head, and the fact that you have

been deceived by that terrible old Horrocks is not going to turn him in your disfavor . . . especially when he learns how you have protected us and sent us to safety and then gone back to clear his skirts of infamy, no matter what the course. So . . ." she looked at the astonished Jesuit, "if you will kindly marry us, Father, and with no further delay, I shall be able to face whatever fate may hold immediately in store for us with a stronger and a happier heart."

Father Ignatius appeared for a moment to reflect. "Perhaps you are right, my daughter," said he. "Two souls thus united in the sacred covenant of marriage are not to be severed, whether in this world or the next." And he looked at Ruderic for confirmation of the request. But Sheila would permit of no delay.

"The moon is very low," said she, impatiently, "and in another hour we shall have to get on our way. We cannot tell what calamity may happen us within the next few hours, but my religion tells me that the tie of sacred wedlock is far stronger than that of love which is not consecrated by holy offices, and a covenant made in heaven; and that while mere lovers might never meet there, a husband and a wife who are also lovers must surely be reunited. So you will please to marry us, Father, and as quickly as may be in keeping, for our time is very short."

There was no gainsaying this spirited speech, whether in its faith or in its logic, nor did there seem reason for refusal. Wherefore, with no further aid, the good priest performed his function, of which May Benton was the witness. Ruderic, dazed, feeling that he should protest, yet trapped by his promise made, was therefore presently awakened to the fact that he was wed and the Jesuit pronouncing the benediction and, this concluded, offering respectful felicitations in a voice from which he strove to banish the habitual melancholy. May Benton, who had

overcome her awe of Sheila and appeared also to have received from her no small amount of high courage, as if through induction, was murmuring her soft congratulations.

But Sheila, now that her purpose was achieved, set abruptly aside the soft and tender emotions which had possessed her some moments before. She turned to Ruderic and looked smilingly up into his face.

"Kiss me, my husband," said she, "and then let us all make our way to the boat. The moon is very low and if we wait longer we shall have to grope our way through the dark."

"You are right," said Ruderic, and they went to gather up their effects, when Ruderic saw that the bodies of the slain men had disappeared. He looked inquiringly at the priest, who nodded.

"Mistress May and I scooped their shallow graves in the loose sand," said he. "Dirk is apart from the others."

With no further words they gathered up their burdens and, in the deepening darkness, turned their faces away from the spot which, for all its desolation, had been the scene of the turning point, the renaissance of Ruderic's life; that where his hatred had died, had been interred, and love had been born in his heart.

Chapter XXXII

AND so to strife again. The faint glimmer of the moon was nearly extinguished as the little party threaded its way between the dunes and over the low, sandy ridge in the direction of the boat. As Ruderic had predicted, a faint, cool draught of air was fanning from the east, and the stars scarce visible through the soggy brume which was spreading and thickening across the sky.

"Within twelve hours' time," said Ruderic, "you should be safe in port unless picked up by a ship of war, or other vessel."

Coming presently to where the Jesuit and his ill-starred buccaneer companions had left the boat, they found the water almost to the craft, for the tide was flooding the flat beach. They shoved clear, when Ruderic waded out and placed his charges aboard, then clambered over the side and stepped to the mast and loosed the spritsail. It was his plan to sail with them until abeam the schooner, then passing as closely as he thought safe in the low visibility, to let himself into the water and swim quietly up under *Hirondelle's* flaring bows, when he might creep silently up the bobstay. In the deeper water there would be slight danger from a cuttlefish, and as for Corporal John Shark, he would have to take his chance. But he doubted that the sharks would venture over the shallow bar, or up so far into the bay, the more so as the sailors were in the habit of shooting their muskets at a circling fin.

It must not be supposed that his returning to the schooner was no more than an act of blind devotion to a principle, nor a forlorn hope to undo the damage wrought

unjustly on O'Conor by Horrocks and himself. Ruderic had a purposeful and reasonable design as well. With the wind in its present quarter, even though faint, he felt that it might prove possible to drift the schooner across the bar, with the drop keel hauled hard up, if her people were still at liberty and in possession of her. To accomplish this it would be necessary to mount some sort of working jury-rig for the support of her headsails, as otherwise she could scarcely be made to steer.

It was the opinion of Father Ignatius that the buccaneers would neither attempt to cut off and plunder *Hironnelle* nor yet aid her to escape.

"Differently situated they might seize her," said he. "But pocketed in this place, with a government vessel standing on and off in the harbor mouth and a boat sent to fetch others, whether Yankee or British, they would scarcely dare attempt an overt act. There is nothing that I know of which should condemn them at this moment. But I do not think they would permit your people to make their repairs and try to sail out, lest her coming and going incriminate them as having given aid and comfort to a pirate. But I do not see how she could hope to get out in any case, the channel at the harbor mouth being so narrow and blockaded by the barkentine with her boats."

"How much water is there over the sands at the northern end of the harbor?" Ruderic asked.

"Scarcely more than enough to float such a boat as this," replied the priest, and, knowing nothing of the peculiar construction of *Hironnelle*, he added, "A vessel of the tonnage of your schooner would surely take the ground, and there are masses of coral rock. The most for which you can hope is that the buccaneers may keep clear of the business, which I think most probable under the circumstances, and that in consideration of the past services of Lord O'Conor, and by the deposition of Master

Benton, the authorites may deal leniently with you and be disposed to accept your claims to honest intention. But at the very least you must expect the confiscation of the vessel and the slaves, with a heavy penalty in fines and possible imprisonment." He reflected for a moment, then shook his head. "The decision to inform the buccaneers that you are of the same ilk, or worse, is most unfortunate, and it is of course impossible to say what may or may not result therefrom."

In spite of this gloomy prognosis, Ruderic was somewhat encouraged by the priest's opinion that the buccaneers would keep out of the affair. Master Horrocks had said that *Hirondelle* could make the passage of the shoals, and Master Horrocks knew whereof he spoke. In the darkness it would be a risky undertaking, but might yet be accomplished were *Hirondelle* in the possession of her people. This uncertain fact remained still to be seen. But before their cumbersome craft, which was in the nature of a small whaleboat, had drifted very far with the damp easterly breeze, Ruderic feared that his hopes were vain ones.

The reason for this first developed, when through the murk, they were able to see the dark opacity against the sky of the schooner's mainsail, which, for some reason, had not been lowered, and a few minutes later, in the stillness of the night, for the breeze was very faint, their ears were caught by sounds which suggested an orgy of drunken revelry coming from aboard her. Ruderic had dropped the sail to avoid risk of discovery, he and the Jesuit pulling an oar on either side. As they drew nearer and abreast of the schooner, the reason for these forbidding noises could not be mistaken.

Whether as friends or foes the buccaneers were unquestionably aboard the schooner and had, with or without permission, possessed themselves of the choice wines

and spirits to be found among her stores. There were bursts of maudlin song and laughter, shrill oaths and blasphemies, and occasionally the report of a musket or pistol, after the habit of the buccaneers who, in their debauches, were wont to discharge their firearms, in the air or at some living target, even at the cost of a human life which might represent commercial value. There could be no doubt but that some sort of drunken spree was in full course, but whether this was in accordance with the plea for hospitality or despite the wishes of O'Conor remained still to be ascertained.

Then, directly abeam the vessel, Ruderic shipped his oar. They were less than a quarter of a mile away, but the night was so dark there was no risk of their being discovered.

"Steer straight before the wind, Father," said Ruderic, "and if it holds you should find yourself at daylight not far from New Providence, when you may put into the port. There you may report to the authorities the truth of what has happened and request the protection of the ladies until our fate is decided. Hoist the sail as soon as you have got a little farther from the schooner."

He stepped into the stern sheets and, stooping down, held Sheila for a moment in his arms. She clung to him, not trusting herself to speak, but, with no sign of faint-heartedness, unloosed him and sank back upon her thwart. With a handclasp to May Benton and the priest who had so well befriended them, Ruderic slipped over the boat's side, and, thrusting himself clear, began to swim toward the schooner, strongly and steadily, albeit with a certain tingling of his extremities at thought that any moment he might find himself deprived of one or more of them.

The boat, freighted with all his heart and soul, glided off to dissolve in the murk. Ahead of Ruderic, *Hironnelle* bulked up of formidable dimensions out of all proportion

to her actual size. Swimming slowly that there be no commotion of the water or the glint from an undulation which might attract some eye undimmed by drink, Ruderic directed his course a little ahead of the vessel, and came presently, unperceived, beneath her bowsprit. From the nature of the disordered sounds he was inclined to believe that the orgy was on the wane, for there would be intermittent pauses in the snatches of tuneless song and laughter, hoarse or shrill. As those know who have witnessed such revels, their progress is marked by different phases of excitation, which, toward the end, becomes sporadic before fading into mumblings, and at the last a sodden inertia. It was this stage which now seemed to possess the beautiful fabric that had been consigned to such a lamentable traffic. No steps had been taken toward the repair of her damaged gear, as the foremast still floated astern.

Ruderic reached for the chain bobstay and swarmed up over it. Hearing no voices on the forecastle, he concluded that the spent revelers were grouped in the waist and on the quarter deck. Moored alongside was a ship's boat, that in which the buccaneers had put off to her.

Ruderic climbed up and got astride a cat-head, then was about to hoist himself for a look over the bow when, almost in his ear, a soft voice murmured quaveringly, "Oh, Masther Ruderic, how come ye here? And where is the Lady Sheila?"

"Lanty!" whispered Ruderic. "What has happened? Lady Sheila is safe, and May Benton. They are in a small boat, making their way for New Providence in care of a good priest we fell in with on the shore."

"Praise the Saints!" muttered Lanty, and glanced back over his shoulder. "There has been devil's work here, sor. These scalawags came aboard and were received politely by his lordship, who towld his story which at first they were willing to believe. Then they asked for drink, sayin' there

was great lack of it ashore, and, bein' in no position to refuse, a puncheon of rum was sent on deck and broached. Even then all might have been well had not our own hellions got loose of tongue and let the cat out o' the bag. And then, sor, all hell bruk loose—" Lanty was seized by a spasm of shuddering.

Ruderic gripped his arm and gave him a shake. "What happened?" he demanded.

"They tuk his lordship and Masther Horrocks and lashed them to the main riggin' and prodded them wit' knives to make them tell where wuz the gold and jewels that must be aboard. They struck them over the face with a ratlin's end, and in other ways maltreated them, though I do not think to their serious damage; for both are still strong, though bruised and bleedin.' And our crew, shame and scorn to them, maddened by the drink, took part in the baitin' of their masthers. Only meself they did not molest, the crew tellin' them I was a warlock of sorts and that such as had done me ill had come to an evil end. I played my antics for them, and so doin' divarted them from his lordship and Masther Horrocks."

"And are they still tied up?" asked Ruderic.

"They are, sor, for I have not dared to loose them till these devils do be all bowled over by the rum. They learned from our hands the secret of the vessel and how light draughted she was, and 'twas their scheme to set up her foremast and slip out over the shoals at high water. Perhaps they may still do so, but I doubt it, they bein' now too drunk. And leave me tell you somethin', sor," Lanty's voice sank lower, "ayther the barkentine, beyant, must put to sea or come in here for shelter and take her chance with these devils from the pit, for by sun-up 'twill be blowin' a devastatin' gale."

A stab of fear went through Ruderic. "Why do you think that?" he asked.

"I more than think it, sor," said Lanty. "I feel it from the marrow o' my bones and the goose-creeps at me back. The slant is now northeasterly but soon it will back into southeast and blow a hurricane."

Ruderic felt himself grow cold. He knew that Lanty possessed that instinct of the wild fowl, which flocks into sheltered water before a gale, and he thought of the helpless three drifting out into the North East Channel in the open boat. To be sure they were under some protection from the line of reef and shoal, but should Lanty's prediction prove true, as he was convinced it must, they were in danger of being driven out into the deeper water and swamped.

From farther aft came still some intermittent outbursts, mostly of quarrelsome nature, but subsiding quickly under the strong fumes of the fiery rum. Lanty glanced back over his shoulder, then gave another shudder.

"'Twas meself that sloshed the drink into their dirty skins, sor," said he. "The sooner drunk the better, thinks I, for then they may be for a while of no danger, and I can loose his lordship and Masther Horrocks. These do be only the masthers of the rabble aboard. 'The fewer, the better cheer,' says they, and fired muskets at the other scuts, tellin' them to keep off. Oh, Masther Ruderic, if only we could slip our cable and let her drift out over the shoals, we might yet pick up Lady Sheila before it is too late."

Ruderic hoisted himself up over the bow and on to the forecastle head. The same idea had occurred to him. In the uproar which had been going on aboard the schooner a fight now would pass unnoticed. At any cost, he must get control of the vessel, when, slipping their cable, as Lanty had said, contrive to drift out over the shoals and pick up the boat; when, in their crippled condition, they must chance it with the hurricane.

But immediately it was forced upon his reasoning, with despair, that he could not hope to handle the schooner under the mainsail alone, and that, without the balancing pressure of headsails, she would not steer, but must luff into the wind before steerage way could be gained. It was doubtful if O'Conor and Horrocks would be physically able, after their maltreatment, to lend a hand, while such of the crew as he might hope to drive by word and blow were now too drunk to be of use. Lanty's aid alone would be inadequate.

Ruderic looked down the decks. Aside from some few swaying figures clinging to the rail or rigging in drunken dispute, there appeared to be no active movement, most of the buccaneers, with whom were included the crew, having sunk down overcome, to slumber where they fell. The grim thought flashed through Ruderic's brain that, so far as concerned the buccaneers, no great obstacle presented, as he had only to fling them overside as so much refuse littering the decks. Lanty pointed out to him the figures of O'Conor and Horrocks, still lashed to the main rigging, one to port, the other to starboard. Seen dimly through the murk they presented the aspect of men crucified, their bodies sagging and held from wrists bound to the shrouds above their heads. Ruderic wondered if they still lived, and was inclined to doubt it despite Lanty's assurance that, though sadly spent from torture, they had suffered no mortal injury. But more important to Ruderic at that crucial moment was the problem of hands sufficient to hoist the headsails rigged provisionally from the bowsprit to the mainmast truck, and tend the sheets, and steer the vessel and execute the maneuvers necessary to make the passage. He was trying, with despair, to determine how this might be accomplished when Lanty, reading his thought with that subtle instinct which was his peculiar gift, presented a solution of the problem, this

so fantastic that for a moment Ruderic was unable to consider it.

"Now for hands, Masther," said Lanty, "have we not the blacks, sor?"

"The blacks!" said Ruderic, "are you daft?"

"Folks say I am, sor, and, judged from other fools of more sober sinse, they may be right."

"What use could we make of the blacks?" demanded Ruderic. "To begin with, they are not sailors, and they could not understand an order if they were. Besides, they are shackled down below and to loose them now, with all hands drunk, might easily make an end of everything."

"Aisy, sor," said Lanty. "Have you not seen how Lanty can talk to them as he talks to you or to the burrds or any other livin' crayture? True, they know nothin' of a ship's gear, and would make sad wurrk of the handlin' of it. But why may we not put them in a boat, with Lanty the coxswain, and tow the schooner out across the shoal. They may not know the use of oars, but they can paddle, and with each man of them grippin' his oar paddle-wise, and with the great strength of them, might they not keep off the schooner's head until we are across the shoals? And as for the shackles, they are forged of cold-shear and brittle as glass, and a tap from a hammer would crack them as a child might crack an egg. Do you lave them blacks to me, sor, as I shall lave these scuts of buccaneers to you. The buccaneers are drunk, and drunk or sober are but scum, and the blacks will follow Lanty and do his bidding as harses turned afield will take their orders from a goat or jackass."

"Far be it from me to deny the working of such a miracle," muttered Ruderic. "I must free those two before it is too late, if it be not so already." He stepped down the low break of the forecastle-head into the waist. Here the decks were strewn with a swarm of prostrate

bodies, inert or nearly so, and Ruderic strode over and between them much puzzled that such hardened and leathern-lined drinkers as these should be so quickly rendered helpless by their potations. Among sailors of their sort a carouse might have been expected to continue for many hours before their succumbing even to such copious draughts as Lanty must have served them.

As Ruderic drew near O'Conor, whom he greatly feared to be already dead, two men, by far more fully in possession of their faculties than any of the others, ceased their growling dispute to glare at him with heads thrust forward, the better to see him through the murk. Ruderic guessed that they were placed there as a guard, lest some rum-maddened brute, in a frenzy of blood-lust, see fit to try his failing power of arm by a knife-thrust at the helpless victim. Even in the darkness Ruderic could see that they were not of the schooner's crew, but doubtless persons of some authority with the ill-set brotherhood, as they were less ragged and unkempt. The nearer of the two was a mulatto, or perhaps an alcatrace, a Dominican or Haytian.

"*Qui c'est?*" he growled in Creole. "*Ou ca va aller, Saoul imbecile . . . ?*" and his hand went to the butt of the pistol in his sash.

"Down with your dogs!" snarled Ruderic between his teeth, and thrust quickly with his knife; then, following with the weight of his body, his heavy fist crashed between the eyes of the other, who fell backward over the bulwarks and into the water. His cry was answered by a yell from across the deck and a pair, detailed likewise for the guarding of Horrocks, lunged forward to a tardy rescue tugging at their machetes, such weapons being much in vogue among the hunter-butcher buccaneers. Ruderic wrenched a heavy pin from the fife-rail and turned in time to parry the blow of the first, then struck him down. The second,

stupid and dismayed at what must have seemed to his sluggish senses an act of drunken madness, fetched up short and began to shout, in Creole-Spanish, maledictions and appeals for aid. This hesitation proved to be his bane, as Ruderic, now fairly parted on his course to take the deck in charge, whipped up the machete which had fallen at his feet and cut him down.

For some moments, then, Ruderic whirled in a vortex of devastation. Such of the buccaneers, and even men of the crew, as were able to rally their reeling powers of mind and body, now flung themselves to the suppression of what appeared to be a murderous paroxysm on the part of one of their number. But such was their fuddled state that Ruderic was at no time hard pressed, his principal danger being from a random pistol shot, blindly discharged. Wherefore, in the briefest space for so sanguinary an encounter, he cast his eyes about to find no man opposing him. Such as were not *hors de combat*, whether through drunkenness or his cyclonic burst of thrusts and slashes, had staggered aft to the barriket of rum which has been set on end against the mainmast foot, its head stove for freer service, and now, dipping in their gourds, jostled and swore one to the other that the fight was none of their affair, and a man were a fool to risk his hide in such when drunk.

Ruderic, leaving them to their pleasure for the moment, released O'Conor and laid him on the deck, then served Horrocks likewise. Both were unconscious, moribund as Ruderic thought, until enlightened as to their condition by Lanty, who presently came cowering to his side.

"Sure they may yet come round, sor, be favor o' the blessed Saints," said he. "They were forced to dr'ink wit' thim buccaneers."

"But how could the drinking even of pure rum lay out a pack like this in so short a time?" demanded Ruderic. "Two thirds of them are dead to all intent or purpose."

Lanty gave a nervous, whimpering chuckle. "Faith, and 'twas not the rum alone, Masther Ruderic," said he. "Ye will be rememberin' the carboy o' paregoric provided by Masther Horrocks agin the bloody flux which broke out amongst the blacks the v'yge befor?"

Ruderic's smarting eyes opened wide. "You mixed some of that stuff with the rum!"

"Some of it, sor?" squeaked Lanty. "'Twas the whole av it! I let the divils slake the hot edge av their thir'rst, then fetched up the carboy av dr'rug. 'She do be too raw for the palates av gintlemen,' says I to thim as was clus-tered round the firkin like waspses on the rim av a cup. 'A bit av sweetenin' wit' Frinch absint' will aise her down,' says I. They sniffed the spout av the carboy, and as ye may not know, sor, the smell av this droog and absint' is the same. '*Fait, donc, mon vieux . . .*' says this mulatter av Hayti who was guardin' his lordship and prickin' him from time to time as fancy tuk him, wishful to make him say where was his gold. He knew absint' and loved it, him bein' in a manner Frinch, but he knew it better than to gooze it as did thim others. Troth, sor, and how it can be there are any now able to stand upon their fate is more than I can understand." He looked forward. "But 'twill not be for long, sor. 'Tis the last gasp av the str'rangled stoat."

Ruderic, following his gaze, perceived that this was true. Dark as the night had become, he could still see that the group of men which had been about the firkin had sunk down to the deck, overwhelmed by this final potation. A silence, utter and absolute, had fallen where but some short minutes before was such a squall of strife as must have completed the intimidation of any buccaneers who, unin-vited to the orgy, may have been hovering about in boats like jackals, hopeful to snatch some fragment of the feast.

The fitful breeze appeared to have fallen, but some frag-

ment of it still lingered aloft, as Ruderic could see from the fluttering of the telltale at the topmast truck. This stood out for an instant against the opaque sky, then drooped again.

"Light some lanterns," said Ruderic. "Then get a hammer and go below and free the blacks. You are sure that you can make them understand?"

"Sure, Masther Ruderic," said Lanty; "and have ye not yet learned that all tongues are the same to Lanty? Can I not talk wit' Frinch or Spaniards or red Injuns, wanst I have listened a bit to their fashion av spache? Troth, sor, and what difference does it make to Lanty if he wud be talkin' wit' blackbirds, or black men?"

Ruderic nodded. "Go free the blacks," said he.

Chapter XXXIII

ALTHOUGH admitting the feasibility of Lanty's plan that a boat or two be manned by the huge and muscular blacks for the towing of the schooner across the shoal and to keep her bow off the wind, toward which it might otherwise be swung by the thrust of the mainsail, Ruderic had come to a different decision. He knew that Lanty made no idle boast in saying that he could chatter freely with the sable, uncouth creatures who, despite his association with them, had impressed Ruderic always as though human, yet the denizens of some other world, perhaps a nether world. He was, however, forced to admit that he had never found them recalcitrant or vicious, whether on this or other voyages. Coming as they did aboard the schooner from the series of horrors immediately behind them, and being met with humane treatment, cleanliness, free air, and good food in plenty, the spirits of these simple folk revived as they began to put away from them the somber memories of slave raid and caravan to the coast, the barracoons, and fearful voyage in that pestilential ulcer of the ocean, a slave-ship.

And here aboard the *Hirondelle* not only was there this vast improvement of material conditions but, for the first time in many months, some rays of gladness and cheer began to filter through the storm-clouds which had hovered over their crushed spirits for so long. They listened avidly to the music of O'Conor and his daughter, the violin and harp, strains of a purity and sweetness which at first bewildered them. Then came the favors which Sheila was wont to bestow, fruit or confections or a tub of

some refreshing drink and sangaree infused with a dash of rum. But best of all for the ebullient nature of the blacks was Lanty, Lanty the kindly, the comic, the grotesque; Lanty whose gentle heart had ever melted at sight of any living creature in distress; Lanty their friend and comforter and Merry Andrew.

Aboard the whaler, when overwhelmed with anguish of body and mind they had fallen into moping, a mate with a shambok of rhinoceros hide, or a man-of-warsman's cat-o'-nine-tails, had roused them from their apathy and forced them to sing and dance and make other dreadful mockery of merriment. But here aboard *Hirondelle*, after the first day or two, they needed but the mere sight of Lanty picking and pecking his way across the deck in droll mimicry of a cock, or springing for the rigging with a face and gestures and chatter of a startled ape, to throw the simple fellows into such convulsions that they would wallow on the decks, and for some time after the violence of mirth subsided, and the pantomime was over, they would give vent to the curious nasal explosions of laughter peculiar to their race.

But, as Ruderic had seen, the relations of Lanty with them were by no means of buffoonery alone. He would squat down on deck, encircled by the great black, hulking creatures, and cocking, his head aside, would listen to their chatter as a merl listens to some other bird of alien note, and, like the merl, he would presently assay its vocalisms. And as the days had passed, none could deny but that he held fluent converse with them, and, in such perfect mimicry and intonation, that if one's back were turned, none could have guessed but that it was a black who spoke.

Yet such was the acknowledgment of Lanty's singular gifts that none found this in any way remarkable, or even much regarded it. The faculty was taken for granted as to be expected of the 'Natural.' Since Lanty could hold

parley with horse or dog or poultry or sea gull, to say nothing of Creole or Spaniard, then why not blacks? A language was to him like the catching of a tuneful melody to a musician.

But no less important, at this juncture even more so, was the affection which the negroes held for him and the peculiar influence he had upon them. It was as though he embodied their group soul and was in a fashion their genii, a sort of elfin guide, counselor, and friend. They would have followed his bidding blindly, and Ruderic now felt that they could be made to follow it intelligently, and for several reasons he determined to profit by this advantage.

He decided not to waste time and a valuable man power in towing out across the shoal, but to employ it under Lanty's supervision in the stepping of the foreshortened foremast, before the wind should rise and make such a task most difficult if not impossible.

For Ruderic reasoned that, in the light and baffling air then stirring, not only would the schooner be unmanageable, but, even holding a true course, the small boat with its big spritsail must outdistance her. He was convinced that in an effort to overhaul her time would actually be saved in getting a working rig upon the schooner, and he figured also that it lacked still some two hours for the full of the flood when the crossing of the shoal might be attempted with the greatest hope of success.

The decks of *Hirondelle* were now plunged in a silence broken only by the stertorous snoring of the drugged men, and Ruderic feared no interference from the shore. Should a boat appear he would take up a musket and fire on it, and he had small doubt that were the necessity to arise these picked black giants would, under Lanty's orders, take up weapons and fight.

So now he set himself to the clearing of the decks.

O'Conor and Horrocks he carried down into the cabin and laid them on their bunks, observing by the dim light of the slush lamps that, although stained with dried blood from many minor prickings, and their faces bruised and discolored from blows, their breathing was slow and regular, and their pulses beating strongly enough in the case of O'Conor, but that of Horrocks in a flickering fashion which made him fear that the end could not be far away.

His immediate solicitude, however, was all for the three in the small boat; this, naturally concentrated upon Sheila, and there was no time to be lost if he were to overhaul and pick them up before the dawn broke and with it the hurricane predicted by Lanty.

As Ruderic came on deck again and set himself as best he could to the clearing of the foresail and its fouled gear, he heard below him the sharp clicking of Lanty's hammer against the shackles and manacles of cold-shear iron, roughly forged by the plantation smith and his apprentices, and with a steady monosyllabic patter of throaty voices. This presently ceased when Lanty popped up through the main hatch like a gnome, slipping out of its cavern a Lob, a Pook, or Bogart of sorts. He turned and called below when, by the dim flare of the lanterns he had lighted, Ruderic witnessed a spectacle which suggested an outthronging of devils from the pit.

But there was this difference, that here were benignant and obedient familiars, like a band of genii, summoned to his aid. The lurid glare flickered on flat, ebony faces with white flashing teeth and rolling eyes in which was no malignancy. It glistened on the great rippling muscles and the huge torsos naked to the waist as the Africans, under Lanty's orders, shuffled into a semblance of formation, stretching their great limbs, rubbing their chafed members, expanding their lungs to the free air, docile and expectant.

And then began a task which Ruderic, first doubtful of its accomplishment, soon perceived to be no great problem with such willing brawn, intelligently directed. He quickly caused the stump of the foremast to be cleared of its chocks and wedges, then clearing the gaff of the mainsail, swung it under the shrouds and forward where, securely stayed, he used it as a derrick boom to lift out the fragment. Unreefing the lanyards of the foremast shrouds from the deadeyes at the chains, he set a black, who seemed to have some skill as carpenter, to dress the heel of the spar that it might fit the step. Then with tackles to the gaff and vangs rigged out to bowsprit and mainmast head and port and starboard chains by which its perpendicular position might be controlled, it was hoisted up clear of the deck and lowered into place. The lanyards were quickly foreshortened and hauled taut. Fore and headstays were set up and halyards reeved when the foresail was hoisted and double-reeved to compensate for the shortening of the mast; this not proving necessary with the headsails because of an ample clearance in their hoist.

And all the time that this was being done the air was growing more opaque and warmer and more oppressive, and Ruderic, going below to ascertain the condition of O'Conor and Horrocks, observed the amazing drop in the column of mercury from which he knew that Lanty's prophecy of change of weather must be very soon fulfilled.

The wind, still baffling and fitful, was now more southerly, though still in a quarter to enable the whaleboat, in which were Sheila, May Benton and the priest, to hold her course. But it had never fallen altogether, and by three of the morning which saw the accomplishment of the task aboard, Ruderic began to breathe more freely. He calculated that by this time the boat must be half-way to her destination.

She had been five hours on her course of thirty miles to

New Providence with a wind which, though light, had held fair and which should have given her, Ruderic hoped, a speed of at least three miles an hour, and the priest had assured him that he need have no fears of his losing his direction, he being possessed of some natural faculty in this respect.

The tide must by this time have begun to ebb, Ruderic thought, and, all being now in readiness, he caused the sodden heaps of humanity which littered the decks to be lowered into the buccaneers' big boat, living and dead alike, when she was moored by her killick and cast off from the schooner's side.

Hirondelle's own crew having treacherously played their masters false, and being at best an evil lot, he threw in with the buccaneers.

"If these good blacks can rig the schooner, they will serve to handle her," said he to Lanty. "Now, serve them out a ration of food and a panniken apiece of clean mixed grog, and then we will heave up our anchor and soon find out whether or not this night's work has been in vain."

Chapter XXXIV

IF the buccaneers ashore heard the clanking of the capstan pawls and clatter of the chain cable through the hawse pipe as the blacks broke out the anchor and heaved it home they showed at least no interest in *Hirondelle*'s immediate maneuvers.

Their weather wisdom must have told them by this time that a hurricane was soon to break, and having no knowledge that a vessel of that bulk could dare attempt the crossing of the shoals they doubtless reasoned that here was some drunken escapade or silly determination to put to sea and brave the coming storm, counting that the barkentine must by this time have stood away from her dangerous position to seek other shelter, which was precisely what a sensible commander would have done.

Ruderic realized fully that what he now attempted was a desperate measure and one warranted only by the exigencies of the situation. He considered for a moment the alternative of beating out through the channel by which they had entered the harbor on the chance of the blockading vessel having put out to sea. But in the pitchy darkness there was scant choice between the two, as he would be as apt to strike on either side the narrow harbor mouth as on the shoals.

Wherefore, with foresail lowered and with the darker opacity of the great mole directly abeam on the port hand to serve as a vague landmark, he swung the head of *Hirondelle* and let her drift slowly northward.

Blanketed as they were by the mole there was scarcely breeze enough to put steerage way upon the schooner but

a drift lead heaved by Lanty showed that they were gliding slowly ahead, drawn, as Ruderic thought, in the suck of the tide which had just begun to ebb. To ground now would prove fatal to their attempt, as before they could carry out a kedge to warp clear, the schooner would be hard and fast.

But they did not ground. "A miss is as good as a mile," and ten inches as good as ten fathoms when they are between a vessel's bottom and that of the water which floats her. There was scarcely wider margin than this for about a cable's length, but presently the depth dropped suddenly on the edge of the bank to three fathoms, and then at the next heaving, the lead went "overboard" as sailors say when it finds no bottom at all, which was not surprising, as they had drifted into fifteen hundred fathoms of water.

"Now, go below," said Ruderic to Lanty, "and do what you can for his lordship and Master Horrocks and Captain Benton, and look alive about it as we may shortly have to hang a leg and get in sail."

"The wind will come up notch by notch, sor," said Lanty, and ducked below.

This prediction proved to be correct. The damp draught began presently to freshen, not as does the trade wind with a brisk roughing of the sea's surface, but as though creeping stealthily down from aloft, so that it was sighing and thrumming through the topmost shrouds before the force of it was felt on deck.

Then, as this began gradually to manifest itself, *Hironnelle* rushed through the water as though possessed of an intelligence which told her the urgency of her errand and of which she accepted gladly the mission.

It was five of the morning when Lanty came on deck after his ministrations to the sorely stricken men. Ruderic was by this time fully aware that their chances of picking

up the boat were hopeless. There would be no dawn, and daylight, when finally it came, must prove as dark as dusk and with a visibility which would scarcely be extended beyond the schooner's length. But by that time it was to be hoped that the boat would either have made her port or that Father Ignatius, by virtue of his experience and knowledge of what to expect, would have run in and beached her where his charges and himself might land with safety while there was yet time to accomplish this.

"His lordship is none so ill, sor," Lanty reported, "though still slapin' off the droog. But Masther Horrocks do be in sorry state. He is moanin' and mutterin' in some strange tongue, and be the fearful writhin' av his face and the awful look in the eyes av him I misdoubt but he do be recitin' the Devil's Mass."

"It would not be strange if he were off his head from the torture and the drug," said Ruderic, heavily. "I'll go below and have a look at him."

But at this moment they were struck by so fierce a squall that *Hirondelle* was hove down on her beam ends when, spilling the wind from her sails, she lay for some moments as though uncertain whether to rise again or not. The water was smooth as they were close under the line of cays, and the rising wind came over these in gusty blows from Tarpum Bay upon the other side. But *Hirondelle* strained presently up again and, as she resumed her onward rush, Ruderic observed that it was growing rapidly darker, which was precisely opposite to what should have been the case, as it was now six o'clock.

He came therefore to a swift decision. It was evident that they were in for a hurricane which might last for many hours, though at that season it was not apt to be of long duration. He had heard Horrocks describe these cyclonic tempests and say that a ship seeking shelter

under the land could never be safe, as the wind might suddenly whip around and she find herself on a lee shore instead of under the lee of it. The only security was to be found in such a landlocked basin as they had just left, sheltered by high ground, and, next to that, according to Horrocks, a stanch ship was better off in open sea.

What with the sudden darkening, and air filled with spindrift and now a deluge of rain, all vision was blotted out at the range of several paces. Ruderic knew that it was too late to try to pick his way into shelter while the conditions made the passage of the Northwest Providence Channel and Straits of Florida a dubious hazard. Eastward of him lay the broad Atlantic, outside a mouth which could not possibly be missed, and Ruderic determined to put about and, running well clear of Great Abaco, heave the schooner to for the riding out of the gale.

Wherefore, calling Lanty to take the wheel, he managed by dint of gestures and example to instruct the blacks in the setting of a storm trysail, rigged from the mainmast head to the foot of the foremast, and of a canvas so heavy that, when wet, a man could scarcely bend it in his hands. Mainsail and headsails were lowered and snugly furled and, with the wind abeam, *Hirondelle* was headed straight for the open sea and soon rising and falling on the tremendous billows rolling up from the southeast.

With the schooner hove to on the wind, and with wheel lashed and lee scupper buried so to rise and fall until the gale blew out, there was for the time being nothing to do but to await this indefinite event, with such patience as one might, praying always that the stout and new, and carefully selected gear might hold. This was the first really violent tempest by which *Hirondelle* had ever been proven to her solid core, as their outward voyage had been attended by good weather in the main and their later cruising

taking them never any distance from shelter. They had sought this on the one or two occasions necessary.

Ruderic, observing with weary satisfaction the splendid behavior of the schooner, which rode the great surges like a gull, sheets of water slanting over her, went finally below.

O'Conor appeared to be resting comfortably enough, still sleeping, while Horrocks had fallen into a state of coma from which it seemed doubtful to Ruderic that he would emerge, and it cannot be said that Ruderic greatly cared whether or not he did so. He found himself as yet unable to forgive this man his terrible mistake, and all that had resulted therefrom.

But Ruderic was comforted by the thought that Father Ignatius, by virtue of his intelligence and nautical knowledge and long experience of those waters, could not have failed to perceive that a terrific gale was soon to break and, being given ample time, must certainly have run into some shelter or landed on the beach, if he had not, as seemed quite possible, made port in the eight or nine hours before the wind had gained a dangerous violence.

Exhausted to the point of collapse, Ruderic went below and, flinging himself upon his bunk "all standing," as sailors say, too torpid with fatigue to strip off his saturated, steaming clothes, fell instantly into the oblivion of physical nature which refuses further driving.

He slept the clock around, which did not matter: so far as the management of the vessel was concerned, for *Hirondelle* hove to on the starboard tack, maintained about the same position, nosing her way around to follow the wind as it hauled. So that this early summer short-lived gale, though violent while it lasted, proved not of more than a day's duration and whirled off on its northward track to leave the schooner none the worse for her encounter.

Ruderic roused himself to find O'Conor sitting on the locker at the side of his bunk, waiting for him to awaken. It was some moments before Ruderic was able to assemble and co-ordinate his mental faculties, but a pot of strong coffee, brought him by Lanty, cleared his head, and, aside from being very stiff and sore from the violence of late exertions and sundry cuts and bruises, he found himself none the worse from the terrible ordeal.

O'Conor showed no great evidence of his own ill treatment, though it is probable that his suffering was more than he betrayed. He laid his hand upon that of Ruderic and held it for some moments in a strong, but quivering clasp.

"Lad!" said he, "you are a paragon—a paladin. I love you as my own son."

Ruderic smiled faintly. "Well, as to that, sir," he answered, "I may say with truth that at last your sentiment is returned in kind, and with some right."

O'Conor's face lightened, although he could not fully comprehend the significance of this assurance. "Lanty has described what happened aboard the schooner," said he, "and I am still struggling between wonder and admiration of the deed. Now tell me truly, have you good reason to hope that Sheila is safe?"

"All reason in the world, sir," Ruderic answered. "This priest, who had the boat in charge, impressed me as a man of far more than ordinary abilities, and he was given ample time either to make New Providence or find other shelter before the storm was violent enough to render this impossible. They had food and water in plenty, and even if the Jesuit thought best to run into the beach they should have been able to manage with no great hardship, the gale, having been a warm, tropic one."

He described then in detail all that had happened since he had put off in the boat with Sheila, May Benton,

Bo'sun Dirk, and Yellow Jack, and, as O'Conor listened, his pale, ascetic face reflected his growing wonder. But, when Ruderic told of Dirk's confession, his eyes grew suddenly lurid.

"So that was how it happened!" said he. "I never rightly knew. But did Dirk say what afterward befell the child?"

"Ruderic raised himself upon the bunk, and his tawny eyes fastened themselves intently upon those of O'Conor.

"Sir," said he, "I am that child—and, until I listened to Dirk's dying deposition, I believed that you were the man who had treacherously accomplished the ruin of my parents; and, under a tutelage of hate in which Master Horrocks reared me, all of my brain and body and thought and effort has been directed toward the wreaking of a deadly vengeance, not only on you but on your daughter," and, with a sudden change from the steady tones of his narration, Ruderic poured forth in burning, passionate words the story of his life's tragedy. He described how, from earliest infancy, Horrocks had instructed him in his religion of hate, which had taken the place of what, in children of happier circumstance, was a religion of love and devotion and duty to its parents and country and God. In place of the folklore and fairy tales with which happy infancy is usually beguiled, Ruderic's imagery had been based upon the obverse of these happy pictures. Their characters were sinister instead of beautiful; their moral not the triumph of good, but the fatal weakness of such a quality. The ogre and *mauvaise genii*, of them was O'Conor, and the lesson to be drawn invariably the dark and somber one of his entrapping to disgrace and destruction.

But if Ruderic did not spare his teacher, no more did he spare himself, avowing freely the eagerness with which he absorbed these sinister parables and instructions. He told,

not as a confession, but merely as a fact of the conviction readily accepted by himself, that all men were evil, working for Evil in an evil world and under dominion of a God of Evil.

This false philosophy was not unknown to O'Conor, who recognized in it the thesis of certain great, if mistaken, philosophers, but his intelligent mind was quick to perceive how easily and readily it might have been inculcated in the plastic one of a child of Ruderic's strong, uncompromising nature, so that, instead of censuring him, O'Conor's heart went out to him in sympathy and understanding. He could readily appreciate the blight which had been set upon his youth to sear the exfoliating leaves of his spiritual development.

Then, as Ruderic's narrative reached the point of his incipient rebellion against such dogma and his growing determination to tear himself from its fetters at any cost of pride or sense of duty, the tears welled from O'Conor's eyes and rolled down his cheek. He took Ruderic's hand in his and held it firmly clasped as he talked on.

But when Ruderic told of Sheila's insistence that they be married before parting, and of Father Ignatius's performance of the ceremony, O'Conor broke down completely. He buried his face in his hands.

"My little girl!" he sobbed. "My little daughter! And where is she now?"

It was Ruderic's turn to offer comfort. But Lanty had been hovering about like some good spirit of grotesque mien, listening to this amazing solution of past storm-clouds of the soul, just as even at that moment those of the surrounding elements were breaking and scattering over the schooner's trucks.

And now, before Ruderic could speak, the singularly sweet-toned voice of the poor Natural stole into the discourse like a strain of music elusive but convincing.

"Take comfort, my lord, and you, Masther Ruderic," said he. "Lave me tell you both no har'rm has happened me lady so far, nor is it like to."

O'Conor roused himself. "How can you know that?" he asked.

"How can Lanty know when stor'rm is on its way, sor, wit' fair weather all about? How can poor Lanty know where is the nort' av a still and foggy day? How can he see Death in a man's eyes, and him burstin' wit' pride and stren'th as I saw it in the eyes av Simon Peter and Yellow Jack, which last I towld your honor had gone to his doom?"

"That is so," O'Conor admitted.

"No har'rm could happen milady, and apart of her swate soul havin' its roots in poor Lanty's hear'rt, wit'out he knew it. Were she sore distressed, Lanty would feel it like a chill in the bones of him, and were she to lave this life, she would come to bid him *au revoir* on her way to Paradise. So do not fret, me gentlemen, for she is safe, though we may be some time in the findin' of her. Do not fear, sors. Lanty knows."

Chapter XXXV

WITH the abatement of the gale, O'Conor decided to make for the plantation, there to land the slaves, who were not to go unrewarded for their part so faithfully played, and then to make report to the authorities of all that had occurred in the matter of the buccaneers.

These, for some reason, had left unmolested Captain Benton who, very low from loss of blood, and semi-delirious from fever developed of his wound, had tossed upon his bunk scarcely conscious of what was taking place about him. The indignity and tortures of O'Conor and Horrocks had been directed toward the extortion of gold, and in revenge for their action in attacking others in the brotherhood, and they must ultimately have been killed but for Ruderic's rescue and Lanty's stealthy drugging of the rum. It had not apparently seemed worth while to include in their torment that of a shipmaster already stripped and dying of his hurts so far as one might judge.

Horrocks, still comatose, appeared to be sinking, though slowly by reason of his astonishing vitality. For all his past affection, it seemed to Ruderic scarcely more than a just retribution for the havoc he had wrought and the tragedy so narrowly averted as the result of his eager willingness to condemn on insufficient evidence.

"From my own considerable experience with different members of the Brotherhood of Jesus," said O'Conor to Ruderic, "Sheila could not be in better hands. These itinerant missionaries are carefully selected for uncommon talents and abilities, and schooled to their tasks before being flung to the four corners of the earth for the redemp-

tion of souls and improvement of physical conditions of those among whom their fearful tasks are undertaken.

"Among scholars they are the wisest; of soldiers the most strategic; with parties of exploration the surest guides; with sailors the mariners of greatest skill and intuition. It is a part of their preparation to excel in the very professions or occupations of those whom they are ordained to frequent."

"So Father Ignatius impressed me," Ruderic agreed, "and his *sauf-conduit* among the buccaneers would seem to prove his force as well as his capacity."

"He will place the girls, no doubt, in some convent whence we may be informed of their location," said O'Conor. "But in the meantime I hope to be free to clear my skirts and run back to Providence with the schooner."

So *Hirondelle* was laid upon her course, their position being ascertained by Ruderic as $27^{\circ} 18'$ of north latitude and $77^{\circ} 23'$ west longitude from Greenwich.

On the evening of this same day, Lanty came on deck to say that Master Horrocks had roused suddenly from his coma and desired to speak immediately with Ruderic and O'Conor.

"His sands do be runnin' out fast, sor," said Lanty, "but there is a lovely change in him. There be glory in his face. Belike he has talked wit' some holy angel who has towld him av his error."

As O'Conor and Ruderic drew beside the bunk on which the great, wasted frame of Horrocks reposed, they instantly perceived the truth of Lanty's words. For some astonishing revelation had unquestionably been vouchsafed this mistaken soul. Perhaps, as Lanty averred, he had indeed held converse with saints and angels, or, for the mind skeptical of such communings, perhaps in his semi-conscious state he had overheard Ruderic's description of

Dirk's confession and the conviction of his error had been so imprinted upon his deeper consciousness that now, although unable to remember how or where this impression had been etched, the result was the same.

Lanty, a natural nurse, held to his lips a cup of the bitter, stimulating draught prepared from the nux-vomica plant which Horrocks had been wont to take in his increasing moments of deadly faintness, for alcohol, in every form, he had eschewed. Strengthened for the instant by this, Horrocks turned to the pair a face in which was the mingled expression of infinite remorse and a sort of unearthly radiance.

"I have seen God," he said, in his sepulchral tones, "and He is just. Perhaps I have seen him too late for my own salvation, but if so it is no more than I merit."

"Oh, sor," cried Lanty. "No livin' man can see God too late, or He would not be after takin' pains to show His face at all, at all."

"Peace, Lanty!" rumbled Horrocks. "Be that as it may, I accept the judgment. Ruderic, I have been wrong. I do not ask you to forgive me. I ask you only to strive to forget that such a man as Abram Horrocks ever lived, and to purge your mind of his false doctrines."

"I have already rid myself of the doctrines, uncle," said Ruderic, "and I shall pray for the peace of your soul."

A gleam of satisfaction showed for a moment in Horrocks's eyes. He raised his huge, emaciated hand and pointed to O'Conor.

"That is a good man," said he, "and innocent of any wrong to you or yours. Cast out your hatred, lad, and when the poison of it is cleansed from your soul, plant love there. It will grow the stronger because the field has lain fallow."

He raised himself suddenly upon his elbow. The radi-

ance brightened in his face and there seemed to be about his thick, clustered hair, now snowy white, a sort of nimbus, such as might be vouchsafed even at the eleventh hour by an all-tender and all-merciful Deity to the sinner who truly and earnestly repents.

Ruderic now perceived in his face such a gentleness, more than that of a *douceur*, as he never would have imagined those harsh and craggy features capable of wearing, and for the moment it flashed across his mind that, doubtless, Master Horrocks had already donned the lineaments which were to be his in the peace to come, and of which he stood upon the threshold. For, in all justice to such, it must be said that their wickedness and the evil which they cause does not result from unkindliness of soul. All evil, of course, proceeds from error, but there is this difference that the truly wicked person, such as Yellow Jack, finds pleasure in committing it, whereas the wrong philosopher, like Master Horrocks, obeys the dictates of his warped reasonings with regret and as a duty imposed. So that, perhaps, there may be absolution for such, and it would seem so in his case, as, fixing Ruderic with his cavernous eyes, of which the habitual glow was rapidly fading, he said in a quiet, meditative voice:—

“The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ I have been a fool, lad. With God all about me, in the sea and sky and on the high hills, I could not see what was there. It is a very stupid man who must wait until his eyes are rinsed by the hand of Death to see what has always been before them.” A faint smile wreathed his bluish lips. “Let me tell you, Ruderic, there is no such stubborn theory-driven fool as the wise philosopher who—”

His rumbling voice died into a gurgle and Ruderic, watching him, was reminded of the sinking of Captain Benton’s ship. Just so, did Horrocks appear to be sub-

siding from the world of men and the buffetings and tormentings of the sea. His end now came precisely as that of the ship, with no disturbance of the milieu, scarcely a ripple or an eddy, and just as the ship had been under full canvas at one moment and gone the next, so did the full coherence of Master Horrocks transfer itself with no disturbing interruption to another element or plane.

Lanty began to patter some fragments of prayer and laid a silver crucifix which he had brought from Sheila's cabin, upon the dead man's chest. O'Conor and Ruderic went out and up on to the deck. "*Requiescat in pace,*" said O'Conor, meditatively. "He was a better man than I had thought, because his wickedness was all in theory. But that goes to prove, Ruderic, that a good man of obstinate ideas may often wreak more havoc than a wicked rascal."

They consigned the body to the deep at sunset, and, with a good slant, *Hirondelle* glided on her way to slip up the river mouth three days later. O'Conor immediately made an official report of his attack upon the buccaneers and the salving of their plundered cargo, to which Captain Benton, now convalescent, made affidavit. There was nothing said about the slaves, nor did O'Conor see fit to mention the leading of the barkentine across the reef. No report of the occurrence could as yet have been received, and he decided not to bother trouble till trouble bothered him. It was indeed doubtful if such offense were ever brought home to him at all, as in policing of the seas a charge of lawless practice held slight value unless the culprit were taken red-handed in *delicto flagrante*.

¶ All three men, O'Conor, Ruderic, and Captain Benton, were in feverish anxiety to return at once to Providence and establish beyond question the safety of those dear ones. But as the more valuable part, and indeed the bulk, of Master Benton's cargo had been salved by O'Conor, and unloaded and placed within a warehouse, the shipmaster

felt that he should remain and set about the matter of its transport as soon as might be, in the hope of greeting his daughter on O'Conor's return. Ruderic looked to the shipping of a new foremast and sundry repairs, and a few days later O'Conor and he sailed again southward with anxious, but hopeful hearts, this time with a small but able crew of trustworthy blacks.

"I do not think that we shall be anywhere detained," O'Conor said. "I have an instrument of thanks, duly signed and dated, for our services to Master Benton, and, far from being accused, I think we would have difficulty in convincing anybody there below that we had been penned up, dismasted, and got back to Port Royal and thence to Providence in so short a time. Even so, we have in hand the proof of our honesty and good intention, and, as for the trick we played the barkentine, we can blame that to Master Horrocks, whom it cannot greatly disturb, saying that he was pilot and assured us there was no lack of water."

The run was quickly made. And then, to their grief and dismay, they were, on their arrival in Providence, to discover not any trace of Father Ignatius and his charges.

But one clue was forthcoming, and this a no very hopeful one. From the harbor-master of the port they learned that, the evening of the day before the hurricane, a small brig, *Pemaquid*, owned in Portland, and bound for that city in the State of Maine, had put to sea, her master a daring Yankee skipper, regardless of the portents of bad weather. As the course of this vessel would take her through the Northeast Providence Channel with a reaching breeze, it was possible that the boat had fallen in with her when Father Ignatius, weatherwise and disquiet from the threatening conditions, might have hailed her and been taken aboard.

Wherefore, if they would relieve their anxiety at the earliest date, there seemed nothing to do but to follow

after the brig on the long, northward voyage. For the distracted father and yearning young husband there was no alternative for this, but it was characteristic of O'Conor's trader's instinct that, while devoured by anxiety for his daughter, he still found occasion to take aboard a cargo of ripe cocoanuts and pines and other fruit, saying to Ruderic that this would put the schooner in better trim for an offshore run. Then, with a fresh southwesterly breeze, they put to sea again, northward bound.

Chapter XXXVI

WITH the average fair weather of the season, which was the month of July, *Hirondelle* made the run to Portland in ten-days' time, and here awaited them a disappointment more cruel and poignant than that received at Providence.

For it was feared by the owners of the old brig, *Pemaquid*, that she had been lost in the hurricane reported at the time of her departure from New Providence.

"A staanch vessel, sir," said one of these to O'Conor, "but gettin' on in years and a mite soft, I reckon, in her timbers. Them dead trees o' hern were punky, too, in places, so mebbe they tore out of her. In that case her folks might a been tuk off by some passin' vessel bound out across or daown for South Ameriky—Rio or the River Plate. Don't give up hope for your darter, as there's right smart o' craft in them waters, and you say the gale wa'nt o' long duration. Fossett MacFarlane, skipper o' the *Pemaquid* war a fine seaman, if a chancy feller and haard driver. Best trust God Almighty, sir, and wait for news."

But such encouragement was cold comfort for O'Conor and Ruderic, who had felt the fury of the gale and could not help but visualize the old brig opening up like a hamper in the lash of the seas. Far more reassuring to them, who had evidence of his singular gifts, was Lanty's insistence that Sheila still lived, and that they were yet to recover her. But even he could give no counsel as to their efforts for the accomplishment of this.

"We shall have to follow the owner's advice and wait,

lad," said O'Conor, heavily. "Eat out our hearts we may, but wait we must. There is nothing to be gained in roaming about like the *Flying Dutchman*, and, for all we know, sailing away from our objective."

But Ruderic, younger and more highly energized, could not endure the thought of so passive a course.

"It is better to search, sir, than to wait," said he. "In a quest one feels, at least, that one is making effort, and I do not think that either of us could long support mere waiting. And why should we? Without Sheila there is nothing."

"Then where shall we go?" asked O'Conor, in a dull voice.

"First let us put around to Pemaquid," said Ruderic. "The captain and crew were all of that place, and the first news from any possible survivors might be received there. Offer a bounty for whosoever may communicate such tidings to you. After that let us run back to the Bahamas and comb the cays. They might have been cast up on some outlying one from which they had not the means of getting away."

To this rather hopeless plan O'Conor indifferently agreed. He disposed of his cargo, took fresh water and stores, and they put to sea under conditions of weather not entirely favorable, yet not seeming greatly to matter for a short run of some fifty miles.

Well clear of Casco Bay, there sprang up a cold, damp breeze from the northeast which brought with it wreaths of fog swirling in like smoke, and knowing the dangers of that rock-bound coast, with its scattered islands and out-reaching promontories, Ruderic decided for a wide offing until the weather cleared. Here were no shoals and sandy cays, but jutting fangs and wicked ledges over which great surges roared and swift sluicing tides, and at any moment a plunge into the impenetrable fog which some-

times blotted out the bow of a big ship from its stern even while her topmast trunks might be in sunshine.

At nightfall the wind backed southeast and strengthened to a fresh gale and a great swell began to heave in from the same quarter. Ruderic felt no concern at this and was therefore surprised when, on going below, he discovered Lanty to be in a curious state of agitation, this in itself unparalleled as, while unable to support the loosed passions of human strife, the sensitive fellow had never exhibited the least distress from the dangers of the element.

"What ails you?" Ruderic demanded.

"Troth, and I do not know, sor," Lanty answered, wrinkling his grotesque face in the manner of a nervous ape. "They do seem to be voices callin' from the fog. But I cannot tell whose they are, or whence they come, or what they would be sayin'."

Ruderic stared at him thoughtfully. "Get up on deck," said he, "and maybe you can hear them better." It flashed across his mind that Lanty might be fey—in the receptive mood which comes to many when death is drawing near, but to others, more sensitive and with spirits less bound and hampered by carnal bodies, at crucial moments before a battle or natural cataclysm, or when some loved one, even far removed, may be confronted by a mortal crisis. And if such were the case it seemed to Ruderic that Lanty might be more conductive to such vibrations in the open than within the confines of the cabin. He had heard Horrocks discuss such metaphysics, and the scholar, though materialistic in his infidelity of spiritual things, made no denial of Lanty's gifts, which, however, he claimed were under the operation not of spiritual influence, but physical laws of which science stood in ignorance.

Lanty obeyed with alacrity, when Ruderic flung himself down for an hour or two of sleep. He was awakened by

the jarring of a sea against the schooner's bow, and surprised to find the angular heel greater than that he usually permitted.

Slipping into a reafer and sou'wester, Ruderic went on deck. *Hirondelle* was forging ahead in a welter of phosphorescence, lee scuppers awash, and burdened with a greater stress of canvas than there was any need of carrying for merely the holding on and off of her position until the weather cleared.

Then, to Ruderic's astonishment, he perceived that Lanty held the wheel which he had taken from the negro quartermaster. His thin clothes, fit only for the tropics, were soaking with the spray of those cold waters. His head was bare, and his dank, dripping hair writhed against a white face which was thrust eagerly forward as though he were trying to penetrate the driving mist into which no human eyes could look beyond the tip of the schooner's bowsprit.

"What's this?" demanded Ruderic, angrily, his sense of discipline outraged at such mad performance. He glanced then into the binnacle and saw that the hard, gusty wind was blowing from the southeast and that the schooner was standing in slightly toward the dangerous coast. "Are you daft, Lanty?"

Lanty did not seem to hear. Ruderic seized him by the shoulder and gave him a shake. "Are you trying to pile us up on a ledge?" he demanded, albeit with more astonishment than anger.

Lanty peered up into his face. "'Tis milady pullin' on the string, sor," said he.

"Then the string is pulling on the rocks, idiot," snapped Ruderic.

As if to verify his words, the water about them assumed at this moment an ominous aspect, for the tops of the big surges began to topple and crash and their rhythm was

destroyed so that the schooner appeared to be rushing down a cataract. In an instant there was a roaring and a boiling and a seething all about, the tormented seas rearing to fall backward, and even through the fog, now more a heavy mist, it could be seen that they were plunging across a shallow rock pasture which might terminate at any moment in a wall of solid stone. *Hirondelle* was lurching and staggering drunkenly, and O'Conor, roused from his sleep, came up through the hatch and stared about in consternation.

"Holy Saints!" he cried. "What's doing here?"

"Lanty's gone mad, and run us among the reefs," said Ruderic. "God alone knows where we are or where we may fetch up," and he roared an order to the frightened blacks forward, cowering from the slash of such cold waters as they had no knowledge of, to haul up the drop-keel.

But the order came too late. There was a sudden crashing, rending, splintering sound from underneath. *Hirondelle* tripped like a Galloway nag hunting through the heather and falling foul of a patch of broken rock. So suddenly was she flung upon her side that Ruderic, who had loosed his hand-hold in a leap for the windlass of the drop-keel pennant, was tossed clean off his feet, hurled against the lee rail, which was almost horizontal, flung over it, and found himself struggling and gasping in the smother.

Chapter XXXVII

THE rush of the tide across the rip had carried Ruderic far beyond the fling of a heaving line long before O'Conor, or any other aboard, could lay hand to such or even make sure of their own security.

For a number of minutes immediately thereafter, Ruderic, although a powerful swimmer, was in momentary danger of drowning. There was no trend nor order to the breaking chop. He was so quickly and unevenly flung up and then engulfed as to be unable to catch breath without a lungful of brine along with it, while the churning spume lay so heavy on the water that, even at the best, it was like breathing with the face plunged in a bowl of suds.

Fighting desperately for air, he managed in some fashion, and by dint of heaving himself high up from time to time to keep his consciousness, until presently the swift suck of the tide, ebbing like the current of a rapid river, swept him clear of the ledges where *Hirondelle* had struck and he found himself in comparatively quiet water.

He had not the most remote idea of how far he might be from the coast, or one of the many far flung out-lying islands, for Lanty, having through his mad whim changed the schooner's course, might have been for an hour or two driving inshore. But, from the mere fact of their having struck the ledge, Ruderic did not think that he could be at any great distance from some sort of terra firma.

He calculated that the hour must be after midnight, and, if only the weather were to clear, the dawn, which came

very early at that season and in those latitudes, might show some bit of solid ground to which he could swim.

Wherefore, not to exhaust himself, he paddled sufficiently to keep afloat, and hoping that the chill of the water might not too greatly sap his strength or cause a cramp. The fresh gale blowing was, he opined, of a midsummer sort, and apt to be short lived, and there was a full moon which sought vainly to penetrate the flying mist.

The first chill abated presently and Ruderic, swimming with rhythmic strokes, was conscious of a peculiar indifference as to what might happen him. He had no great fears as to the fate of those aboard the schooner. The swell broken by the shallows was not enough to rend her stanch hull apart, he thought, and the damage all to the drop-keel which, torn away, would enable her to drift clear of the ledges, when they might cast anchor in the sheltered water of their lee.

It struck Ruderic as something in the nature of a grim jest that his invention of the drop-keel might easily prove to be his bane as had befallen Monsieur Guillotine, the inventor of the "drop ax" for the beheading of French political prisoners in the days of the Commune, and whereof the inventor's own neck had been the first to test the efficacy.

Then he remembered Lanty's words, "Tis milady that's pullin' on the string," and it occurred to him that here, too, might be words of portent. If indeed Sheila, from her last resting place on the ocean's bed, was tugging at the lines which held him to her, then was Ruderic ready and eager to be drawn to her there. She had said, when insisting on their marriage, that life was nothing, and that whatever might befall them, the sacred ceremony which had welded their souls was bound to hold them close through all eternity. "So be it," thought Ruderic, to himself; "if such is the answer to the riddle, then should I be glad to prove it."

The result of this inspiration was to remove all dread of drowning, and also to detach him to a great extent from the physical discomforts of cold and fatigue. He swam on and on in a dreamy fashion, finding it more pleasant, on the whole, to make some progress through the water instead of merely supporting himself in it. The surface was fairly smooth, but with long undulations that persisted even inside the natural breakwater of shoals and ledges which *Hirondelle* had skimmed too close. It seemed to Ruderic that he could hear a deep growling rumble at no great distance, but he could not be sure of its direction.

Had the water been tempered like that of the Bahamas, Ruderic might have swum on for many hours with no great inconvenience, for he had quickly got rid of his storm-coat, and he was encumbered little by the shirt and breeches in which he had been sleeping when roused by the shock of the sea. But the water was intensely cold, and this cold abstracted heat which can be converted into terms of power, so that, before two hours had passed, Ruderic found himself the victim of a growing lethargy. This did not seem to be fatigue, but a sort of pervading drowsiness far from unpleasant except in the effort of combating it. His mind became a little confused, but it did not lose its hold on the fancy that the string was pulling him to Sheila, and that before long he would find her in the vasty places of the ocean.

He discovered presently that the dawn was breaking and that as he had expected, the weather was about to clear. The hot summer blast had blown itself out, and now some faint counterdraught, coming off the land, swept away the fog as though Aurora, with her rosy fingers, had first set herself to sweeping the cobwebs from her room. The sky grew brighter in the deliberate fashion of the northern latitudes and presently, as the horizon cleared, Ruderic roused himself and discovered a small island just ahead

and not more than a mile away. It rose from the smooth surface of the sea in a curiously accidental way, as though it had no proper place there, or as if some student artist had painted a sea-scape and then, finding it monotonous, had decided to inject an island of his own invention. There are many such islands on this harsh coast of Maine, whether grouped or outcropping quite alone.

But to Ruderic's drowsy eyes it looked fantastic and incongruous because of its perfect domelike symmetry and the great pines which rose straight and darkly green against the lightening sky. Its edges were fringed by a collar of white lace and it occurred to Ruderic that, while the tide might drift him down directly to this sanctuary, the landing on it in his numbed condition would be a far less simple matter.

With a sense of the duty of self-preservation Ruderic roused himself to stronger exertion, and began to swim to this tuft of *terra firma*, which seemed to have been thrust up for his salvation. Like most men who have composed their spirits for the withdrawal from earthly interests, Ruderic was a little resentful at this dragging back to them again. It appeared to strike at the dignity of the whole night's performance, and to betray its false promise. But reflecting that, after all, humans were but set upon this round treadmill to plod pluckily on, Ruderic kicked his way along, and presently discovered, from the rapidity with which the island seemed to move in his direction, that he was in a strong and favorable flow of the tide.

Looking all about, he could see no sign of *Hirondelle*. Either she had drifted off the rocks and sunk, or else been left by the receding tide upon her beam ends, or possibly broken up; he could not tell. Then presently the sun rose on a perfect day and swept the water with a delicate crimson, and the swells began to mount and flash rays in broad bands of color. Numb to all consciousness of

physical sensation, Ruderic felt as though he were swimming, not in brine, but some impalpable medium as light as air.

Nearer and nearer came this thickly wooded islet, the great pines growing so close to the rim of the low cliffs that their spreading boughs hung over the deep water beneath. The long rollers smote against this rampart heavily with a churning and swirling and spouting of spray, and their backwash reached Ruderic to make stronger effort imperative. Then he discovered a crescent reef which swept out to form a little bight where there was a pebbly beach and, summoning all his remaining strength, he swam in for this and grounded in water waist-deep.

His body seemed intolerably heavy, as though weighted down by some ponderous medium. But he managed to stagger up, clear of high-water mark, to a patch of sedge, and there, with a sigh of infinite relief at having no longer to fight off his crushing weariness, he sank down and drifted into oblivion.

Chapter XXXVIII

THE most baffling sensations attended Ruderic's awakening. Even before this was in any way complete, he was joyfully aware that he had indeed discovered Sheila, and that, wherever else they might have met, it was not on the ocean's bed. But they were together somewhere, so that Lanty had vindicated his assertion that she was "pulling on the string," and Sheila had been right in her insistence that Love was stronger than Death, especially if it be wedded love and consecrated by a holy office.

Ruderic opened his eyes to see Sheila's face inverted over his and, being not yet quite able to speak, he contented himself for an instant with its nearness and the satisfaction to find it was not the face of a drowned maiden, but rosy, with violet eyes which were almost purple, and the full carmine lips so vivid of color that they would have left most ladies open to the suspicion of cosmetic artifice. Ruderic had never pondered greatly on the physical conditions of future life or, if so, would have doubted that there were any such, but it now struck him as incongruous that Sheila should have such substance as to enable him to feel the pressure of his head in her lap, and the contact of her fingers in his hair. Then she lowered her head and pressed her lips on his.

It was this kiss which fully revived him, as such kisses have the fashion of doing, but even then he had his doubts. His memory awakened to all that had happened him, even while his mind balked at acceptance of the fact that here

was Sheila in the warm and glowing flesh. For how could Sheila have got upon this wooded island which poked up out of the open sea like the roached and rounded back of a porcupine?

He managed to find his voice and breathed her name. This brought another dose of that stimulating elixir which is a kiss from tender lips. It was followed by a sob and a sudden shower of tears.

“Oh, my darling—my darling own,” crooned Sheila, holding him close in her strong, young arms. “I knew that I should find you again.”

“How did you get here?” Ruderic asked.

“And how should I get here, but in a boat, since I am not yet a mermaid, though partly seal like yourself, to swim thenight through, to crawl up on the rocks to sleep and sun yourself. When, early this morning, *Hirondelle* came fluttering into port and we learned that you had been struck adrift, all the good folk of the place took to their boats and scattered out to hunt for you. Some angel whispered to me that you might have grounded here, so I rowed out to look for you, and here you were.” She straightened up and pointed seaward. “Look! There is one of them, and there to the westward is another.”

Ruderic raised himself on his elbow and saw, at some distance, two fishing skiffs which were crawling over the smooth surface, with one man at the oars and another to look about. He let his head fall with a little shake of bewilderment.

“How did you get here, Sheila, and how long have you been here?”

“Faith and it is not so miraculous as it must seem to you,” said Sheila. “Some three hours after we parted, that terrible night, we came upon a brig which Father Ignatius first took to be a government vessel. He was beginning to be disturbed about the weather, so he hailed

her and we were taken aboard. She proved to be a Yankee brig, *Pemaquid*, outward bound for Portland with coffee and sugar and spices and the like. Her captain was in haste to get well to sea before the gale broke, he not believing that it would prove so fearful as it did, and saying that a bit of wind from that quarter would set him well upon his way."

"Upon his way to the bottom," murmured Ruderic.

"That is what Father Ignatius told him," said Sheila, "but he laughed and said his brig was like a Chinese junk and built to scud before any wind that ever blew, with no danger of getting pooped. And in this I must admit he proved to be correct, for his old ship was rather like a caravel of build and made good weather of it enough. But the lurching and the straining were too much for her ancient timbers, hewn some sixty years before, and, in the cross-swell which followed the gale, she began to leak so badly that all hands were set to pumping, even to her master and Father Ignatius, who did his share."

"So much for Yankee thrift in the saving of days and dollars," muttered Ruderic.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sheila, "but those were dreadful days. I vow that in a week they pumped several times the fill of that old ship back into the sea, until at last they could pump no more and the water, rushing into her, we were forced to take to the boats which, luckily for us, were good ones and equipped with sails. The sea was smooth and with a fresh, fair wind, and we had time aplenty to provision them. The northwest wind carried us well out, and at sunset of the fourth day it began to blow from the southwest and we were able to head in for the shore, and at morning sighted a small fishing yawl which brought us in here."

"And where is that?" asked Ruderic.

"New Harbor on the coast of Maine, and Pemaquid,

from which the crew hailed, is just across the neck. All were sorely spent and put to bed, and May, who was none the worse, and Father Ignatius, worn to a skeleton, and I, who suffered no ill because these splendid Yankee sailors would not let me lay hand to oars as I wished, have been waiting for the sailing of a schooner for Boston. But, in my wildest hopes, I have never counted on our sweet *Hirondelle*, with the assistance of Lanty, dumping you out plump on my very doorstep."

Ruderic drew a long breath. "This enchanted isle looked to be far at sea when I swam up to it," said he.

"You could not see the coast because of the white fog resting on it early in the morning, but it is not more than a mile or two away. After all, Ruderic, it is not so very astonishing when you pause to think that we were all of us striving for this place."

"I shall never get over the wonder of it," muttered Ruderic, "nor of you, sweet," and, as his eyes burned into hers, the rosy color flamed in Sheila's face. "Lanty is right. You were 'pulling on the string' and you tugged so hard that the poor innocent could not withstand the strain of it, even to the changing of our course, in dangerous waters and heading 'cross rocks on that straight line which is the shortest distance between two points."

Sheila laughed gayly and kissed him again, and continued her kissing in dainty peckings like the rock pigeon feeding its young.

"Now, Ruderic," said she, "we cannot very well throw the blame on poor Lanty."

"No," said Ruderic, and continued as well as he was able, "when one hauls on a bowline as stoutly as we two were heaving, something has to start and go, whether there be intervening rocks or not." He rose suddenly to his feet and put his stiffened arms in motion. "And now,

heart of my heart, and soul of my soul, I think we had better give a wave to these good lads out yonder to let them know that this poor piece of flotsam has been picked up. Then we will get aboard your canoe and paddle back that I may make my excuses to your father for having left the ship without permission."

Chapter XXXIX

O'CONOR, sitting on the porch of a snug cottage built of rough hewn pine slabs of which he had secured the use during the time required for the repairing of *Hirondelle*, looked with a smile at Ruderic and Sheila, who were disposed side by side in that form of support most admirably adjusted to the newly wed, a Carib hammock.

"I have a cousin Brian who would greatly rejoice at being endowed with my title and O'Conor Castle with its estates," said he. "And he may become proud possessor of both with my blessing. There will be small profit in the former, even if it were permissible to a citizen of these United States, which it is not; and, as for the latter, that has always shown a loss so far as I have been able to estimate."

"Nevertheless, father," said Sheila, "is it not your incumbency, as the head of the family, to maintain it?"

"The chances are, my dear," said O'Conor, dryly, "that I may be called upon to contribute towards its maintenance these many years to come, our cousin Brian being an O'Conor, which is the typical Irish nobleman in every sense of the word. But I am more and more convinced that my own canvas is cut in the fashion of a trader, and a colonizer and the promoter of new industries in a fresh field. I have never taken great interest in courts or Kings or the cats which are privileged to look at Kings. I therefore purpose to proclaim myself American and assume all the obligations, and likewise privileges, which good citizenship ordains."

"For my part," said Ruderic, "I shall do the same."

"Very wisely, my son," said O'Conor. "That country over there," he flung out his arm and pointed to the northeast, "saw nothing but bitterness for you—hatred and revenge and all such profitless endeavor. In this newer and better land you have found something quite different, and the word begins with an L."

Ruderic's eyes twinkled. He had been learning gayety in these recent, golden days.

"Luck, sir?" he inquired instantly, and received in payment for his little joke a painful crunching of the fingers which rested in Sheila's little hand.

"You may well call it that, though it was not precisely what I had in mind," said O'Conor, with an iron smile. "Luck must change sooner or later, I presume, and it was high time that something of the sort arrived for you. There are different ways in which a man may carve out fortune, but all tools are good in a new country such as this. There was never any luck in Ireland for the O'Conors that I have been able to discover, so I purpose to change my seat at the table and you, son, are wise to follow my example. Henceforth I am to be known as Mister John O'Conor, gentleman and planter of Port Royal, South Carolina. My father was a Black O'Conor, who ran true to the form of his race, a rioter and waster, but my mother was the daughter of a rich linen draper and the niece of an archbishop, so I am pleased to hope that I may inherit certain qualities of decency and order from her side."

"So far as concerns my own title," said Ruderic, "since such is not to be the custom of the country, I see no use for being burdened with it as if it gave me some especial preference over my fellow citizens, which is beyond the power of any title."

They were interrupted at this moment by one, Fossett MacFarlane, master mariner and late captain of the ill-

starred *Pemaquid*. He was a fibrous, stalwart young man between twenty-five and thirty, of Puritan type, but lacking in the melancholy apathy so often to be found in Pilgrim stock. His gray eyes were roving, alert, and sometimes fierce, for he had done his share of Indian fighting, but there were fine lines denoting mirth at their outer corners, and he had a wide and kindly mouth of which the utterance was not invariably psalms.

At this moment he appeared to be in a state of considerable perturbation, so much so that he had forgot his diffidence of O'Conor and Ruderic, of which latter he had been told privily the late adventures.

"What has gone awry, Captain?" asked Sheila, as the young skipper fetched up in front of her with an impatient tug at his forelock.

"Wal na'ow, you may well ask, Mistress," MacFarlane answered, in his Yankee drawl. "Just when everything was forgin' ahead all full and drawin', here comes a slant that's huv me flat aback."

Sheila knit her straight brows. "Have you and May quarreled?" she demanded.

"Quarreled, Mistress?" answered MacFarlane, in accents of horror. "I want to kna'ow, do you reckon I could quarrel with sech an armful of golden sunshine as May? It's t'other way about. We're both crazy to get spliced bang off, but she's Catholic and I'm Calvinist. And there's Father Ignatius, as good and sensible a man as ever I conversed with but sot on this one p'int, which is that May must not marry outside the Church—as if there wa'n't but one."

Sheila dropped her pretty chin on her knuckles and stared at him thoughtfully. She had, of course, foreseen this difficulty which the brave, if overdaring captain and sweet, childish May had overlooked in the ardor of first love, engendered of danger and close association and his

strong and tender protection and the thoughtful delicacy shown by this rough Puritan and his crew during five days in an open boat.

"Well now, Captain," said she, "we Catholics are all bound to feel so about it. May's father is English and was heret—I should say Protestant. But when he came to face the same contingency as yours he compromised by agreeing that such children as might be born should be baptized in the Church and reared in it. Why can you not do the same?"

A swarthy flush flooded the face of the mariner.

"Wa'al, Mistress Sheila," said he, much embarrassed, "I vum I hadn't looked that fa'ar ahead. But I'm agreeable, though I been raised to think that popery was plumb idolatry and led straight to hell-fire."

"Surely you don't think that May and I are headed for any such destruction, Captain," said Sheila, with a smile.

MacFarlane struck the spruce pillar of the porch a blow with his fist.

"No ma'am. That I don't," said he, "but somehow I'd never feel like I was jined all shipshape and proper unless the knot was tied by a Protestant parson."

O'Conor interrupted with a smile. "I have never heard that a man and a maid could be overmarried, Captain," said he, "though sometimes the reverse has been found unfortunately to occur. Why not, therefore, let Father Ignatius marry you and May and, when the knot is tied to her satisfaction, let your own good minister put his seal upon the ceremony?"

Captain MacFarlane's face lightened. "By Hector, sir," said he, "na'ow thaar's a plum sensible idee. Sort of like puttin' a crown atop a wall on a rope's-end. Thank you kindly, Mistress, and you, too, sir. I'll go tell May," and he strode off with a gait which was a com-

promise between that of a slopping deck and an Indian trail.

"Hold on, Captain, a minute," called O'Conor. "I've got a word to say to you."

MacFarlane swung back and stood before him respectfully.

"It has occurred to me," said O'Conor, "that you and May are not in a position to start your married life upon a very sound financial basis. Her father has lost his ship and a good part of her cargo from the buccaneers, and you have lost yours because you asked too much of her ancient strength. But whatever the cause, it is a time-dishonored custom to blame such misfortune on the captain of the ship, with no consideration of his efforts or abilities. Now I am minded to have a good ship of my own for the transport of my crops of rice and cotton and other products, so, if you wish, I shall commission you to buy me such a vessel and then to take command of her.

"This offer is not alone in recognition of your service to my daughter, but because I find you a worthy and honest man and an able shipmaster."

When the delighted sailor had made his awkward but hearty acknowledgments, and rushed off to impart to May their double good fortune, O'Conor looked at the glowing faces of his children with a smile.

"Troth! but I am like to become a sort of Patriarch and dispenser of bounty in my advancing years," said he, "and there are far worse destinies than that. We shall establish our little colony down there below and work the plantation in the winter months, with a run northward when the season threatens fever."

"I have been thinking, sir," said Ruderic a little diffidently, "that there is great truth in the French proverb, '*Chacun à son métier.*'" Now, I am a ship builder by training and natural inclination, and, if you should see fit

to finance the venture, I think I could do far worse than to establish a yard in this region, where I find there is ready at hand a great abundance of lumber for ship building; pine for planking, oak and elm for knees and keel, and poplar and maple for inside fittings of cabins and splendid fir and spruce for spars. This region should be one day the very cradle for the ship building of this new country."

O'Conor looked deeply interested, for his commercial talents were quick to appreciate the value of Ruderic's suggestion.

"Faith! but I think that you are right, son," said he. "With the development of such a great, rich country as this, there is bound to be unlimited need for American ships, which must sooner or later make their bid for the commerce of the world. And the need for an American navy is very great, as, if England continues her high handed impressing of sailors from American ships, we must soon clash with her again, this time upon the seas. I warmly indorse your plan, Ruderic, the more so as I have never encountered a fresher and more invigorating climate, which is precisely what is needed by our little girl. You may start your shipyard and, when the great cold, which they tell me locks this coast in its icy grip for four months, holds up the work of your yard, you may sail back to the plantation, where there will be no lack to occupy you."

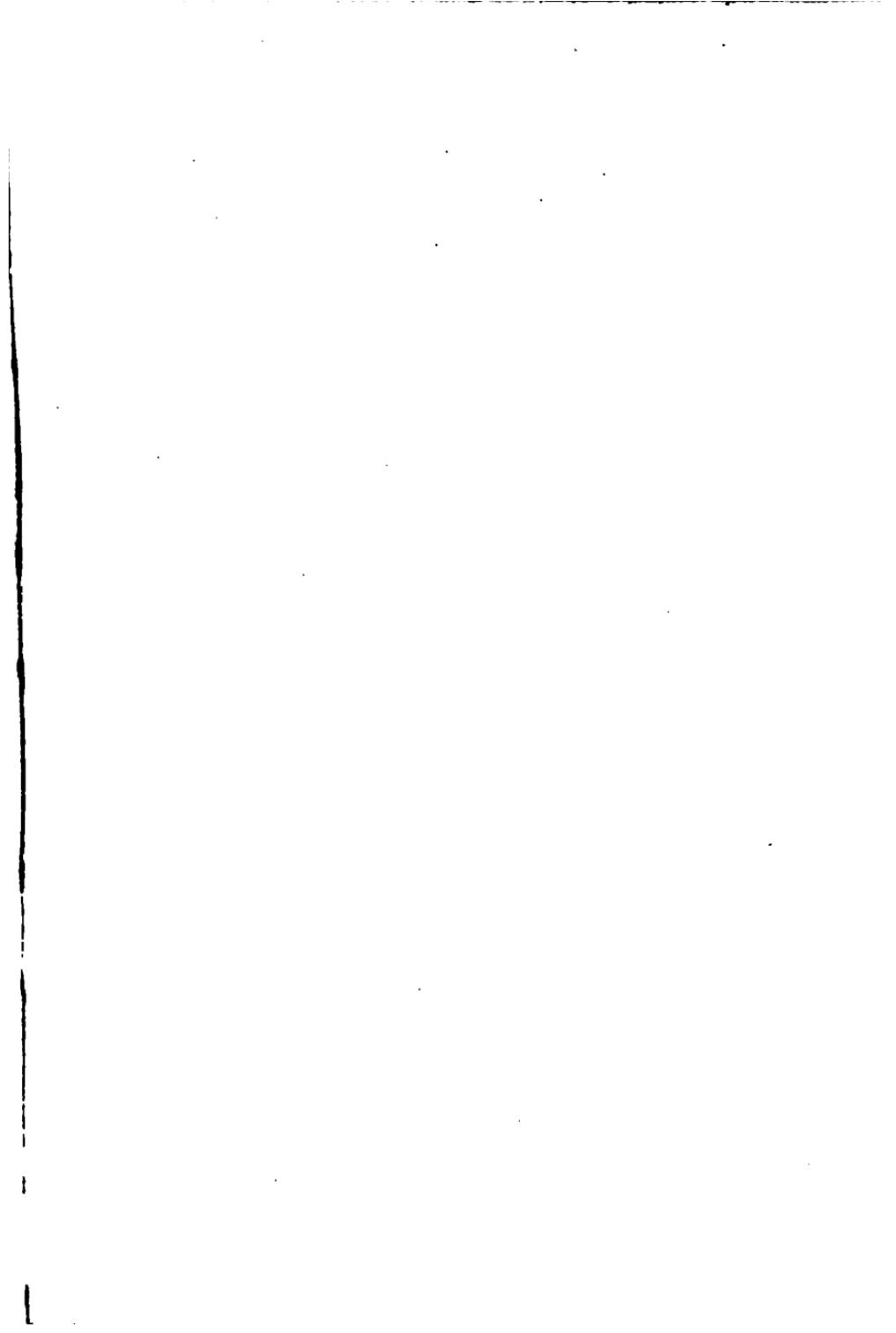
He left them presently to hunt up MacFarlane and discuss with him this plan for which, with his habitual enthusiasm of the promoter, he was now all ardor.

Then, to Sheila and Ruderic, swaying gently in the hammock and exchanging those interminable tendernesses which are so infinitely old while ever ageless in their youth, there came through the open window of the cottage the lilting tone of Lanty's little chantey, the one which Ruderic remembered him to have sung on that grim day

when *Hirondelle* was first wedded to the tide. But only the last verse was now voiced by the gentle Natural, for there was no longer need nor purpose of those sinister ones preceding it, and even this was slightly changed to fit the outcome of events.

Ye have slithered your cargo into the sea
And a shipload of love brought back to me.

THE END



8/15/11